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Keep characters simple for better roleplaying

Pendragon

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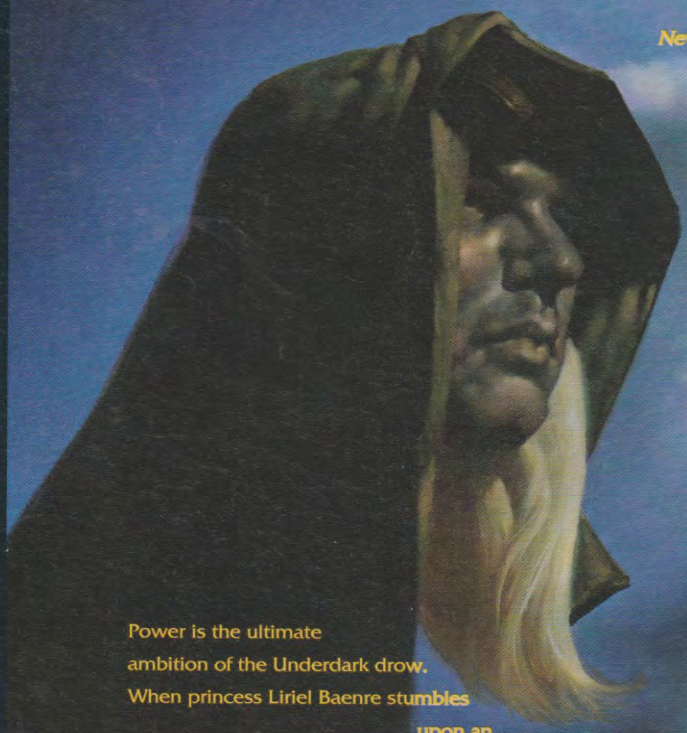

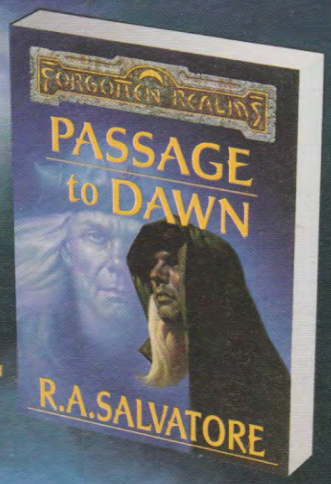

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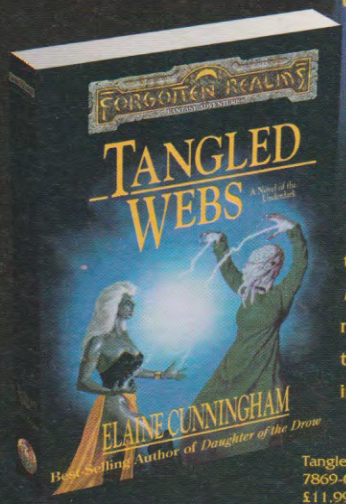

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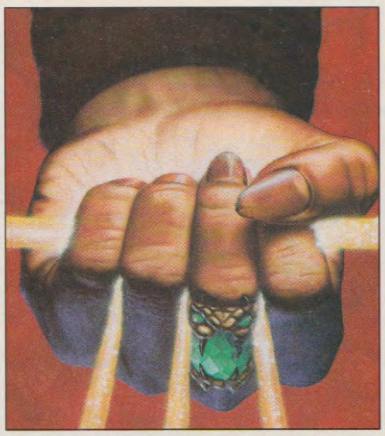
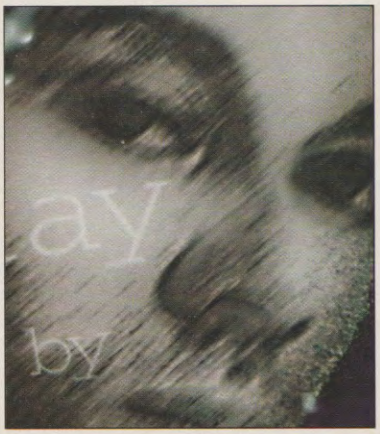


How about making magic more mysterious in your fantasy campaigns? It would make magic users more interesting and make your games more fun!

Magical Mystery Tour feature on page 22

Don't get bogged down with complex personas for your characters – keep them simple for better roleplaying!

Heading in the Right Direction feature on page 32



Get involved in gaming on a mass scale – we tell you how to get into play-by-mail, and give you the chance to try out 20 games for free!

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It's been out of print for way too long, but now it's back – we review *Pendragon*, the best medieval RPG ever!

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This issue would have been impossible without... **crap coffee**
This issue would have been a lot easier without... **crap weather**

UP FRONT

Perhaps the most engaging thing about roleplaying games – the reason we play them and enjoy them so much – is the fantastical way in which we're transported into the minds and bodies of other people. We are, as far as we're concerned in our imaginations, that heroic fighter, that Stormtrooper or that slacker-hacker raiding the data banks of some future mega-corporation. But if we play too much, if we become too familiar with the characters we portray and the worlds they live in, isn't there a danger of our alter egos' lives becoming every bit as mundane as those we live in the real world?

Take, by way of example, magic. How many times have you played a magic user in a fantasy setting, only to hear yourself talk about the spells your character is casting and the rituals he is performing, as if they were part of everyday life, as if they hold no mystery and as if, when all is said and done, your character is doing no more than getting the job done? Magic, like so many other areas in the games we play, has lost its mystery.

In our lead feature this month I've tried to redress this situation, as far as magic is concerned at least, by taking a look at some of the ways that we, as both referees and players of fantasy RPGs, can bring some mystery back into sorcery. I think you'll find it illuminating. Find out more on page 22.

Illustration Simon Gurr

One of the best roleplaying games to appear over the last decade has been re-released this month. Read our review of *Pendragon*, starting on page 56, to find out why we rate it so highly.

It's a bit of a team issue, this one. As I've said, I've written the lead feature, and both Steve Faragher, the consultant editor, and Andy Butcher, the features editor, have contributed to this month's crop. Check out why Steve thinks we should all be returning to the dungeon for our adventuring thrills on page 38, and why Andy is positive that the only way to develop a well-balanced character in the long-run is by keeping it simple in the beginning on page 32.

Other, less home-grown, features in this issue include the third part of Lee Brimmicombe-Wood's excellent series on how to write your own roleplaying game (starting on page 28), and for the first time in **arcane**, play-by-mail games make a splash in our introductory feature, which presents you with the opportunity to have a go at 20 PBM games for no more than the cost of 20 stamps. And of course we've got our monthly pull-out-and-keep Encounter – the Sintra Space Station (see page 41) – which fits in very neatly with the news that *Traveller* is to be released (see our exposé over the page) and that White Wolf has got a new science-fiction game in the offing (which should be with us next year).

The most popular RPG in the office at the moment is *Don't Look Back*, the game of modern-day horror and mystery. We gave it 8/10 in issue 5 of **arcane** – if you'd like to find out why, turn to page 53 to discover how you can order a back issue of the mag.

The fact that these two new systems are on the horizon spells good news for the roleplaying games industry – despite the so-called 'threat' which many have purported in the form of card games, RPGs are thriving. You need look no further than the reviews pages in this very issue of **arcane** for ample evidence of that; to say that we've had a bumper month for new games and supplements would be an understatement. Let's just hope things continue to improve over the coming months!

Paul Pettengale
Editor

DESPATCHES

Back to the future!

This summer will see the return of *Traveller*, the classic science fiction roleplaying game...

For news of another hot sci-fi game in the offing, this one from White Wolf, turn to page 15.

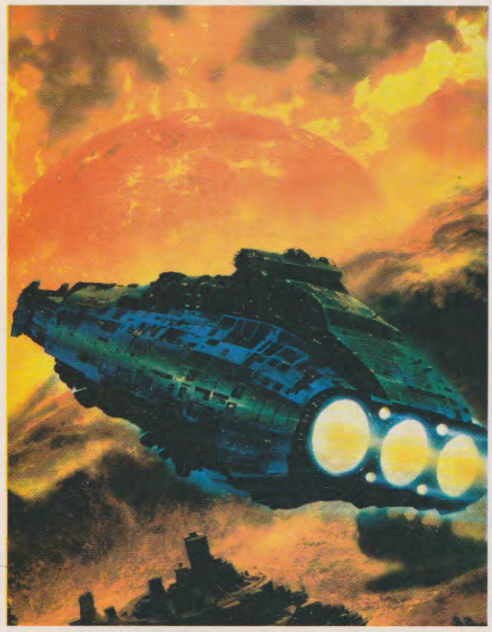
NEWLY FORMED COMPANY Imperium Games has announced that it will be publishing a new edition of *Traveller*, to be released at *GenCon* in August this year.

For 20 years and over three separate editions, *Traveller* has continued to be the pre-eminent hard science fiction roleplaying system. When publisher GDW went out of business earlier this year (**arcane** 2), the future of the game seemed in jeopardy. However, as reported in **arcane** 3, with the closure of GDW the rights to *Traveller* reverted to Marc Miller, it's original creator. Imperium Games has been set up by Ken Whitman (former president of Whit Publications and convention co-ordinator for TSR) and Marc Miller as the new publisher of *Traveller*.

Marc Millers' TRAVELLER

Between them, Ken and Marc have brought together a star-studded cast of designers to produce a new version of the game, including Lester W Smith (*Dark Conspiracy; Dragon Dice*), Tim Brown (*2300 AD; AD&D Dark Sun*), Greg Porter (*Guns, Guns, Guns; CORPS; Macho Women with Guns*), and Don Perrin (*Star of the Guardians*; the *Wing Commander* CCG). Interior pencil art will be provided by the renowned Larry Elmore, with the cover art from leading sci-fi illustrator Chris Foss.

The new version of the game, *Marc Miller's Traveller*, will be released as a single comprehensive book. The rules will see a return to their roots in the 'classic' *Traveller* system, but have been "revised and expanded in light of 20 years of roleplaying



Much of the interior art is in black and white, though it's still of high quality.

experience". Streamlined character generation, a new task system, and improved combat both at an individual and starship level are just some a few of the enhancements being made. Every aspect of the game from the system mechanics to the technology has been considered and updated – according to Imperium Games, the new edition will still be the *Traveller* that fans have come to know and love, but it'll be easier to understand, simpler to use, and more flexible than ever before.

The company's plans don't stop with the release of the basic rulebook, though. Over a dozen supplements and expansions are already scheduled, including sourcebooks covering equipment, aliens, starships, and

"The new edition of *Traveller* will be more flexible than ever"

different settings throughout the history of the *Traveller* universe (see 'What time is it?'). Imperium Games will also be continuing the *Journal of the Traveller's Aid Society* as a bi-monthly magazine, edited by Jean Rabe (author of several *Dragonlance* novels, and former editor of *Polyhedron*).

As if all that wasn't enough, plans are also in the works for additional source material in the form of comics, novels, CD-ROM compilations, design programs, and computer games. Imperium Games is also rumoured to be considering a collectable card game that can be played as a stand-alone game or integrated into starship combat, and there's even the chance that we may see a *Traveller* movie or TV series.

The return of *Traveller* is some of the best news we've heard so far this year, and Imperium Games seems dedicated to making sure that this time it's back for good. We certainly hope so. Look out for an exclusive review of *Marc Miller's Traveller* in **arcane** 10, along with an in-depth interview with Marc Miller and the design team.

What time is it?

Rather than being tied to a specific period in the game's history, as with previous editions, *Marc Miller's Traveller* will allow gamers to play in many different eras through the use of separate *Milieu Books*. The first of these, *Milieu 0*, details the beginnings of the Third Imperium. After 1200 years of chaos and anarchy sparked off by the fall of the previous empire, order is beginning to return to the universe. Chosen because of the freedom it allows to both referees and players, this era is ripe with potential adventure.

Imperium Games intends to produce at least 10 of these *Milieu Books* over the next five years, covering such events as the Aslan Border Wars, the rebellion, the Virus, even the far future and the distant past.

And besides...

Take a trip to GenCon

Don't book your flight to Milwalkee just yet – especially if you saw the story in last month's **arcane** about *GenCon* being held from 8th to 11th October this year. The world's biggest games fair will, of course, be held between 8th and 11th August. Sorry about that – we should have known the correct date, given that we've already booked our tickets (see you there!). For booking information, contact the helpful people at TSR on 01223 212517.

Out of the Wasteland

Wasteland Games has got two supplements for its *STOCS lite* RPG system planned for release towards the end of June. *El Paso* is a Wild West sourcebook, so you can set your campaign in the time of gunslingers and cow rustlers, and *Heretics* is a modern-day campaign setting where creatures called the Hidden plague the minds of the insane. Sounds strange, and it's likely to be so. Each book should be no more than £5 and they'll be available from Esdevium Games on 01252 26116. And if you'd like to win yourself a copy of Wasteland Games' *Maji* supplement for *STOCS lite*, turn to page 15!

Get it on the cheap

If you're after cheap *AD&D* gear, you could do a lot worse than check out the services offered by Games DIRECT, a London based firm who are currently offering up to 25 per cent off TSR products. For more details, phone them on 0500 616666.

More PBM fun!

No Holds Barred is a new PBM games which just managed to miss out on being featured in this month's play-by-mail feature, so we thought we'd drop a brief mention in here... Become the manager of a team which competes in the most violent game in history – that's the idea of this ultra-bloodthirsty PBM system which costs a mere £1.80 per turn. Contact the games creators - Laughing Dog, at Marsh Cottage, Felixstow Ferry, Suffolk IP11 9RZ for your start-up kit. Oh, and have fun.

It's a reet LARP

Calling all LARPers! If you're after costumes with which to dress yourself for your forays into the woods, then give Cuckoo's Nest Enterprises a ring – this new company which specialises in all manner of movie-quality props and garb could have just what you're after. Phone them on 01554 749361.

Conventions

The main events taking place over the next few months.

Convention diary

5-7th July Ambercon UK
Amber diceless roleplaying. *Hilton National, Croydon.* ***Contact Simone Cooper*** *4 The Beeches, 193 Boston Rd, Hanwell, London W7 2JU,* email: simone@wyrdrune.demon.co.uk

6-7th July Games Workshop 1996 Grand Tournament
Leicester University **Contact Games Workshop 1996 Grand Tournament,** *Games Workshop Mail Order, Chewton Street, Hilltop, Eastwood, Nottingham NG16 3HY* **01773 713213**

12-14th July StabCon 96
Woolton Hall, Fallowfield, Manchester ***Contact Stabcon,*** *17 Davenport Park Rd, Stockport, Cheshire SK2 6JU,* email: hammy@riverbank.win-uk.net

13-14th July DrakCon 96
Roleplaying and CCGs with tournaments *Northern College of Education, Aberdeen* ***Contact Sandy Douglas,*** *5 Cottage Brae, Nellfield Place, Aberdeen, Scotland AB1 6DG,* email: ncect6@rmplc.co.uk, web: www.drakcon.wintermute.co.uk/drakcon

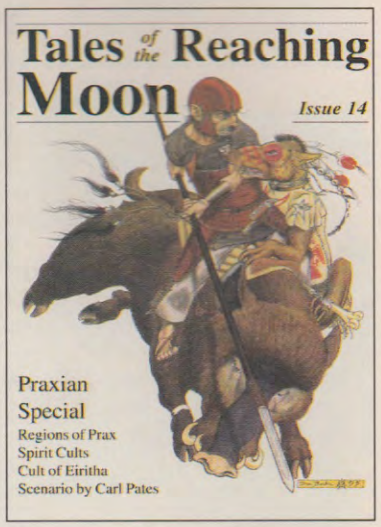
13-14th July Battlemasters IV
Roleplaying, CCGs, board and wargames *The Carlton Suite, Hagley Rd, Birmingham Contact EuroLoG, 46 High St, Herne Bay, Kent CT6 5LH,* **01227 741624**

19-21st July Convulsion 3D
Roleplaying with tournaments *Stamford Hall, Leicester* ***Contact David Hall,*** *Convulsion, 21 Stephenson Court, Osbourne Street, Slough, Berks SL1 1TN*

22nd September Spelbreker
Belgium's biggest gaming festival, now in its third year. Tickets 100bf. Contact: ***Johan & Joachim François***. Wilhelmpark 7, 9900 Eeklo, Belgium, **+32 9 3781265, fax +32 9 3781370**, or: ***De Media,*** *Molenstraat 165, 9900 Eklo, Belgium,* **+32 9 3779394, fax: +32 9 3783678**, email: De Media@hookon.be, Web site: http://www.hookon.be/De Media

On the fanzine front

We don't often cover fanzines in arcane, but we've been sent two this month which we think are deserving of your attention...

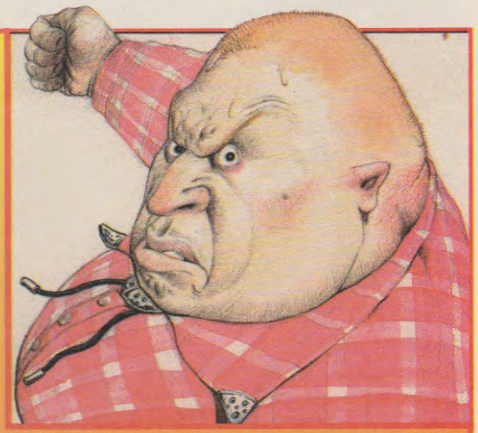


All *RuneQuest* players should make a special effort to get hold of copies of *Tales of the Reaching Moon*, a 64-page colour-covered 'zine which is penned for the most-part by none other than Greg Stafford, he who created the Glorathan campaign setting. Issue 14 of this bi-monthly offering is a Praxian special and, for the asking price of just £2.50, constitutes an absolute bargain. Phone 01753 523169 to find out how you can order a copy.

Almost as good, though somewhat less professional in terms of production is *Warpstone* – a must for all players and referees of *WFRP* campaigns. The first issue reached us earlier in the month and we were greatly impressed. Most helpful is the full index to the reprint version of the *WFRP* rulebook, which must have taken weeks to compile. Unfortunately John Froody, the editor, failed to present us with a price for his 'zine, but you can find out how you can order yourself a copy by writing to: **John Froody, 10 Colenso Road, Clapton, London E5.**

Seymour J Clancy III's great outing

A new threat to our children has been identified. And the famous are at the foot of it yet again...



DANG those durned, damfool draff who do defile bah dawdling in the *danse macabre* of DIM SUM AND DadaisM (in which, small pieces of fish and meat are wrapped in thin dough and steamed in open mockery of the conservatism of nahnteenth centurian art), but ah digest...

Ah am here to day to do mah doody bah denouncing the dazzlingly delectable and demure dinky dreamboat Damon Allbran out of Blur – who, lay-dees and gennermen – has been described OPENLY DISPLAYING HIMSELF IN THE PUB ...as a roleplayer.

The descant-dealing doyen was discovered down the drinking dens dilly-dallying with *Magic: The Gathering* – a new strain of collectible roleplaying game which is outboardly scimitar to a sinisterly twisted form of poker, but where the stakes are YOUR VERY SOUL. Initiates are collected and gathered in a room wherein they are forced to wear magical anoraks in an eldritch attempt to tap the energy lines of the Earth. How many of our chillums have been cruelly 'collected and gathered' in this way? How many lychees have been roo-end? *(Snip* – Ed.)

Seymour can't remember exactly who it was who met Damon playing *Magic* in a pub, but if she'll contact this office again, he'll send her an **arcane** T-shirt. And, if by any remote chance you've seen Oasis running around the woods in full fantasy costume wielding latex weapons, or something like that, he'd be delighted to hear from you, too.

COMING SOON

RuneQuest IV

The classic fantasy RPG is set for a make-over later this year...

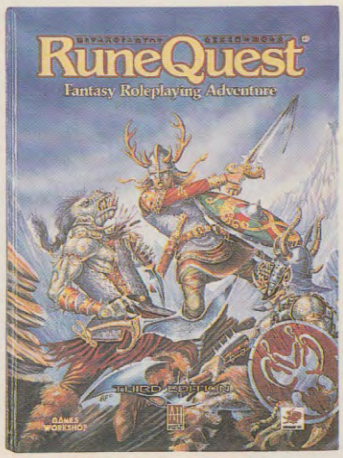
One of the most successful fantasy roleplaying games ever released is going to be updated and massively upgraded for its re-issue later in the year. Work on *RuneQuest IV: Adventures in Glorantha* continues at pace, with dozens of players now participating in an extensive playtesting campaign.

The new version of *RuneQuest*, as the sub-title would indeed suggest, is dropping the dark-ages Europe setting used in the third edition, and getting back to its roots, with the campaign world being Greg Stafford's Glorantha – the setting for the first two editions.

There are a few major changes to the system planned, though the majority are aimed at making the already excellent *RuneQuest* rules clearer, especially for newcomers to the game. There are new rules for the creation of characters, especially as far as the calculation of attributes is concerned, and the combat rules have been trimmed down to make a larger mêlée faster in real-world time (which, in our opinion, is a good thing).

It looks like the magic system is going to remain largely unchanged – a case of 'if it ain't broke...' – though there are some changes to the Sorcery system which are again designed to make using sorcery faster and easier. Also, the creation of familiars will now be based entirely on the sacrifice of POW points instead of a range of characteristics.

There's no fixed release date as yet, though most of the draft script has been written and some of the artwork is in progress. You can rest assured that the moment we manage to lay our hands on a finished copy, you'll be the first to find out what we think of this major gaming release.



Games Workshop released *RuneQuest III* in the UK, but it'll be good old Avalon Hill who will be bringing us the fourth edition later on in the year.

Expanding the future

Netrunner fans will be pleased to hear there's a new expansion set in the offing...

Wizards of the Coast is already hard at work on the first expansion set for the futuristic collectible card game *Netrunner*. Easily the best CCG to be released this year, *Netrunner* (reviewed in **arcane** 6) portrays the desperate battles between the powerful Corporations and cunning Runners of R Talsorian's Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0. roleplaying game, with both sides struggling over secret data.

Details of the set are very sketchy at the moment, but it's rumoured to include around 100 new cards for each side. Although there are tentative plans for an expansion set dealing with multiplayer games, this first set is more likely to concentrate on the basic, two-player game. Due for release in the autumn, look for more details in **arcane** soon.

Worm
4
Program-Icebreaker-Worm-1 MU
: Break wall subroutine.
: +1 strength
"It's hard to describe–but don't eat anything just before you watch it go into action."
Illus. Anson Maddocks
Raptor
1
Program-Icebreaker-Killer-1 MU
: Break sentry subroutine.
: +1 strength
"There's nothing quite like the screech of a Raptor echoing through the data halls as it sweeps in for a kill."
–Kiyote
Illus. Higgins & King
1

Netrunner fans can look forward to the first expansion set.

Famous for 15 Minutes

We've yet to see an *X-files* RPG. *Conspiracy X* (see **arcane** 7) is probably the closest to date – but the show's writers seem to be encouraging game producers to do something about that.

Eric Nolan of Dublin, a business traveller to Seattle, and Robert Stoll, our man in Washington, have been watching *X-files* that won't be screened outside the US for another year. They didn't want to spoil the plot for anyone, but as they've already done so for us, we couldn't see why you lot should be spared a sneak peak at what Rob says is the best episode so far.

In *José Chung's 'From Outer Space'* (episode 20 of the current series), a stereotypical geek character videotapes the FBI's recovery and subsequent autopsy of an alien body found at a UFO crash site. Inevitably, this expression of his inalienable constitutional rights results in your man being done over by the Men-In-Black. Unperturbed, our unlikely hero insists on selling the tape to the TV networks, explaining "I didn't spend all those years playing *Dungeons and Dragons* without learning something about courage."

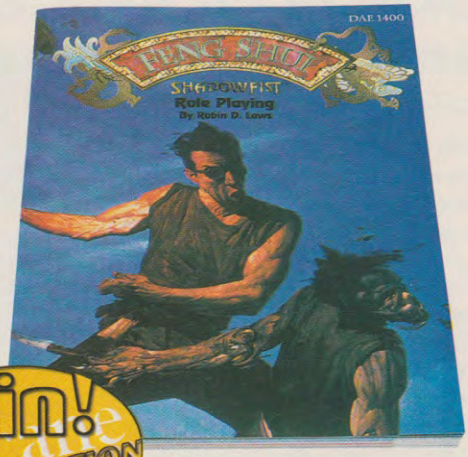
Robert, poor love, wasn't sure whether his contribution to 15 Minutes would qualify him for a T-shirt because he lives in America and he didn't think we'd send one all that way. Why, of course we will – and to Eric in Dublin. We sent Data's Head to Australia, didn't we?

So, if you've seen a roleplaying reference widely broadcast, write to us at:

15 Minutes, arcane,
30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW
or email arcane@futurenet.co.uk
And let's send **arcane** T-shirts all around the world.

Feng Shui arrives (at last!)

But was it worth the wait?



After considerable delays, the first game ever to be awarded the coveted **arcane** Seal of Approval, Daedalus Entertainment's *Feng Shui*, has finally been released. Based on the same setting as the company's popular (and really rather good) collectible card game, *Shadowfist*, *Feng Shui* is a roleplaying game inspired by action movies, especially those made in Hong Kong. Imagine dastardly plots, killer cyborgs, evil demons, martial arts, guns and lots of explosions all combined into a non-stop roller-coaster ride of action and adventure, and you'll have some idea of why *Feng Shui* is such a great game.

A full-colour, 288-page softback book, *Feng Shui* looks almost as good as it plays, and should be available now from all good game stores for around £20. Whether you're a complete newcomer to roleplaying or an experienced player looking for something new and different, we really can't recommend this game highly enough. For full reviews of *Feng Shui* and *Shadowfist*, see **arcane** 1, or check out the **arcane** web site at `http://www.futurenet.co.uk/`

Hong Kong action, here you come!

To celebrate the release of *Feng Shui*, the jolly nice chaps at Daedalus Entertainment have agreed to stump up five copies of the game, and five exclusive posters of Ting Ting, one of the great heroes of the Secret War that forms the background for both *Feng Shui* and *Shadowfist* (Ting Ting was also featured on the cover of **arcane** 1). To win a copy of this fabulous game and a poster, simply answer this question:

win! arcane COMPETITION

Q In what year does Hong Kong revert to Chinese rule?

Clearly mark your entry 'Eat lead, twisted demon-cyborg scum!', and send it to **arcane**, Future Publishing Ltd, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, Avon, BA1 2BW or e-mail it to `arcane@futurenet.co.uk`

Da rules

1. Closing date for entries in the current juncture is 26th July. After that the portals will close, and your messages will be trapped in the Netherworld forever.
2. Anyone attempting to sneak more than one entry past our Pledged guards will be spotted and terminated by a crack squad of Mark 17 Abominations.
3. Employees of Future Publishing and Daedalus Entertainment better not enter.
4. The editor's decision is backed by control of a number of powerful *Feng Shui* sites, and thus you have no choice but to comply with his wishes.

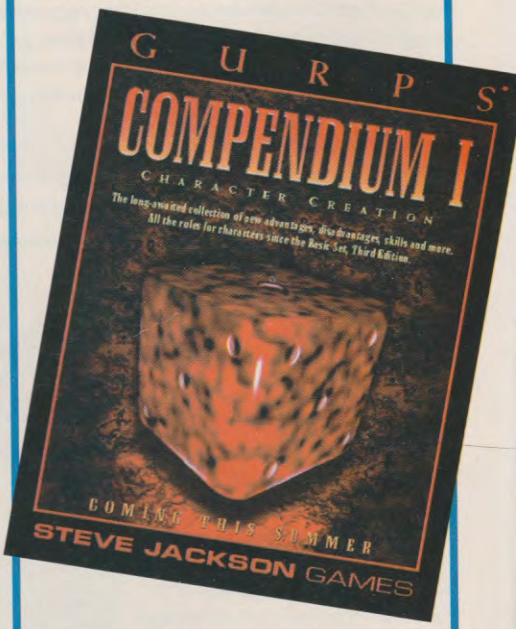
COMING SOON

GURPS Compendium I

Create even better characters with this new *GURPS* expansion.

There have been literally hundreds of new rules governing the creation of characters since the release of *GURPS Basic Set, 3rd Edition* back in 1988, and now, for the first time, you can get at them all in one place with the (impending) release of *GURPS Companion I*.

This 192-page supplement, which should be on the shelves late in the summer (it's currently in the play-test stage), brings together the many advantages, disadvantages, skills and other character generation rules which have been featured in the dozens of *GURPS* releases in the past eight years. Because many of the *GURPS* expansions are now out of print, *GURPS Compendium I* will be the only currently-available place to get at all of this valuable info'. It's got a suggested RRP of $21.95 in the States, so expect it to be around £18 when it arrives in our green and pleasant land.


GURPS
COMPENDIUM I
CHARACTER CREATION
The long-awaited collection of new advantages, disadvantages, skills and more. All the rules for characters since the Basic Set, Third Edition.
COMING THIS SUMMER
STEVE JACKSON GAMES

Even later in the year, Steve Jackson Games intends to bring out the second companion expansion, appropriately entitled *GURPS Compendium II*, which will feature collected rules for campaigning and combat.

Don't Look Now

A new fantasy RPG is currently being planned by Mind Ventures.

There are a number of excellent fantasy systems already 'out there', but the creators of the excellent *Don't Look Back* modern-day horror RPG think that there's room for one more (at least), because it plans to release what is tentatively being called *MV Fantasy* later in the year (probably August).

Mind Ventures is being pretty cagey with its information at the moment, because the game is still in the embryonic stage of development, but it intends to support the game in a big way, with (gulp) monthly releases of scenario packs and sourcebooks. Stay tuned on that one.

Also planned from Mind Ventures are more releases for the *Don't Look Back* line. We already mentioned the *Strange Files of Dr Sorcis* and the *Guide's Pack* in **arcane** 4 (though we're yet to receive either for review), and now we can release details of

Things that Go Bump in the Night – an expansion set of rules and scenarios that enable the characters to play children. To quote Mind Ventures on the release: "If you think trying to convince the authorities that vampires are invading the town as an adult is tough, you should try doing it as a 12 year-old." We shudder to think.

Virtual World revisited

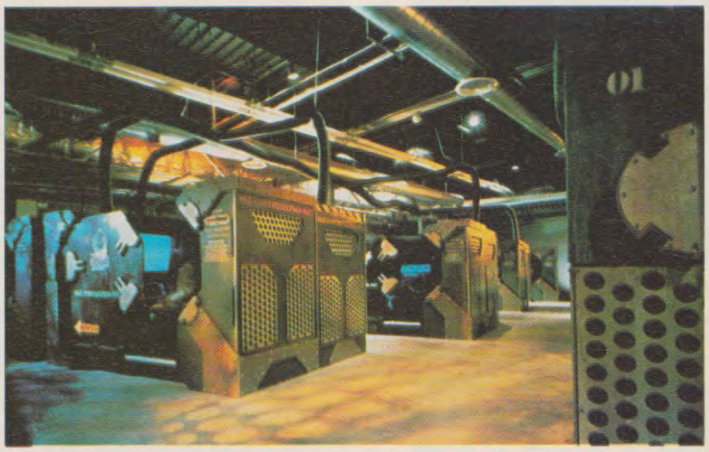
Pasadena plays host to a head-to-head showdown.

While footy fans clamour over the impending Euro '96 matches, across the Atlantic in sunny Pasadena a different kind of conflict is about to kick off.

The international *Virtual World* chain of simulator game sites is having its World Cup in June, set to crown the globe's VR Top Guns. Covered in **arcane** 1, *Virtual World* opened its first European branch in London's Trocadero Centre last year, a 32-player arena featuring head-to-head virtual versions of FASA's *Battletech* wargame and *VW's* own Martian canyon-racer, *Red Planet*.

After selecting a call-sign, players man an enclosed pod decked out with screens and controls, only to be 'translocated' to the *Battletech* arenas of planet Solaris VII, or the Death Star-like trenches of Mars. Each game runs with eight independent pods, enabling players to slug it out in 'Mechs or race their hovertrucks against each other.

The Trocadero site now boasts over 21,000 players on its books. Of those, 85 are 'veterans' (with 25 missions or more), and a select eight have broken the 200+ barrier. With a recent reduction in prices and the instigation of discounts and two-for-one offers, *Virtual World's* popularity remains undampened. But will we see a British challenger in Pasadena this year? Sadly, no. While sites across the USA, Australia, Canada and Japan are hopeful, as yet, no Brits have graded up to the coveted 'Master' status required. "Next year!" promises Union Jack, one of *VW's* tech supremos, adding that the first UK Master Trials are now imminent.



So how come us Brits aren't good enough for the *Virtual World* Cup? Looks like we need some serious practice. Oh well, maybe next year.

In the meantime, there's plenty to keep up-and-coming players busy. Continual software improvements have resulted in a more level playing field, and the addition of new 'Mech variants (based on four standard OmniMech frames), new *Red Planet* Vectored Thrust Vehicles and tracks, and new *Battletech* arenas will keep regular players interested.

Battletech's 12 combat zones now feature such important places from the board game milieu as the Solaris Arenas, and the planets Twycross, Outreach and Tukayyid. The latter is the newest and largest, with 256 square kilometres of virtual ground to fight over. Plans are also afoot to introduce the next generation of control pod, the *Tesla* class, once software glitches have been ironed out, and beyond that the group hopes to open up sites in Germany and Paris. The UK site has begun hosting roleplay sessions, and will also be stocking *Battletech* game products and the new range of *Virtual World* novels. You can netsurf *Virtual World* at `vwelondon.co.uk` and `www.virtualworld.com`.

CARD OF THE MONTH

Obsessive Compulsive Behaviour

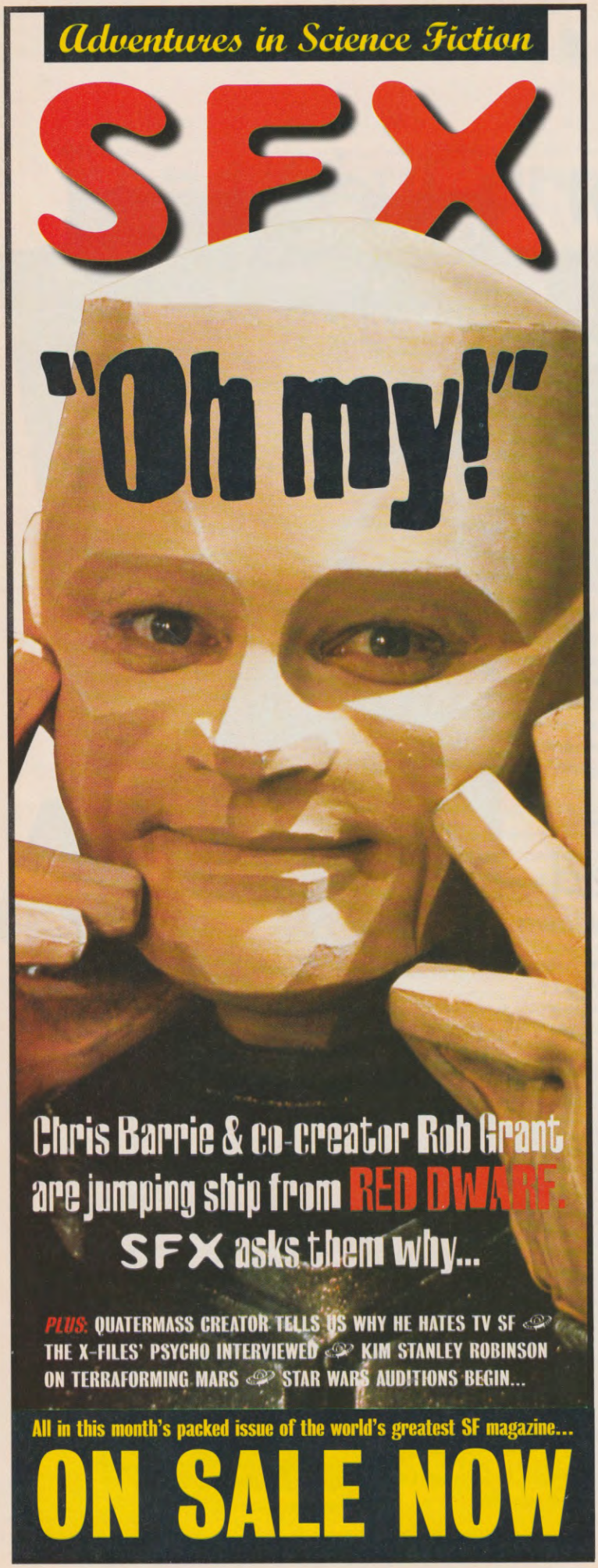
EVENT
OBSESSIVE/COMPULSIVE
AFFECTS OPPONENT'S INVESTIGATOR
Repeated behavior.
At the beginning of each Round, lose 1 Sanity point and reshuffle your Mythos Deck and all discards.

With a lack of things macabre this issue (we kind of went overboard on that score last month...), we thought that this excellent card would redress the balance. Obsessive/Compulsive from the *Mythos* set may not sound the most interesting card on the planet, but when you check out the illustration it's sure to make you squirm! The picture shows someone who suffers from obsessive/compulsive behaviour rubbing his hands together repeatedly – until he's rubbed all the skin off and he's bleeding all over the place. Lovely.

Thanks to Malcome Holden from Bridport for sending us the suggestion (and the card) – your card and an **arcane** T-shirt are on their way to you.

So, do you have a card which you think is particularly cool? If so, send it in to us with an explanation of why you think it deserves the spot of Card of the Month, and win a T-shirt (maybe). We'll return all cards we receive. Honest.

Send your suggestions to: Card of the Month, **arcane**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW.


Adventures in Science Fiction
SFX
"Oh my!"
Chris Barrie & co-creator Rob Grant are jumping ship from RED DWARF.
SFX asks them why...
PLUS: QUATERMASS CREATOR TELLS US WHY HE HATES TV SF
THE X-FILES' PSYCHO INTERVIEWED
KIM STANLEY ROBINSON ON TERRAFORMING MARS
STAR WARS AUDITIONS BEGIN...
All in this month's packed issue of the world's greatest SF magazine...
ON SALE NOW

The way of the Lawyer

Gold Rush Games have announced the reason for the delay of the 3rd edition of *Bushido*. Contrary to some rumours, the company *is* still intending to publish the updated version of the classic Japanese fantasy RPG, and *hasn't* lost the license to do so. Instead, the delay has been caused because Fantasy Games Unlimited, the game's original publisher, has made a claim of ownership to the publishing rights.

Having signed a licensing agreement with Paul Hume and Robert Charrette, the original authors and owners of *Bushido*, Gold Rush has handed the matter over to its attorney, and has every intention of releasing *Bushido* 3rd edition in early 1997. Mark Arsenault, the president of Gold Rush Games said "While it has always been our position that business dealings, especially disagreements between companies, should remain private, the growing number of comments and questions surrounding *Bushido* has prompted us to make this statement." Stay posted for more news as and when we get it.

COMPO WINNERS

'The future's so bright I've got to wear shades' competition winners

Our *Timbuk-3* referential competition for *Netrunner* starter decks (reviewed **arcane** 6) has been won by: *Per Fischer of Arhus, Matthew Stevenson of Haverhill, Mark Thomas of Walthamstow, Marilyn Thompson of Crediton and Martin Wicks of Hull.*

'Tori Amos is a fan of mine' 20 winners

Kathryn Berry of Manchester, Anna Cox of Merseyside, Robert Dewsnap of Sölvesborg, Gareth Evans of Cardiff, Joseph Gardener of South Shields, Fiona Hardy of Westbury, Robert Keasley of Cornwall, Liam Kelly of Cornwall, David Lascelles of Manchester, Rob Lee of Leeds, Jenny Martin of Portsmouth, Alistair Milnes of Edinburgh, Wim Ruelens of Mechelen, Anthony Smith of Reading, Linda Smith of Barnsley, Richard Thompson of Aberystwyth, Steve Watson of Southampton, Mike Weston of Greenock, Moses Wootten of Dorchester and Darren Worthy of York.

'My art is my life' competition, ten winners

William Beck of Plymouth, Wayne Donner of Manchester, Scott Hughes of Liverpool, Vincent Lewin of Leicestershire, Paul Maloney of Mansfield, James McGraw of Stockton-on-Tees, Luke Smith of Bristol, Wendy Snell of Bury St Edmunds, Mark Thomas of Walthamstow and William Wiles of Oxford.

'Where have all the unicorns gone, long time passing?' competition, ten winners

Kai Bodey of Galway, Colin Callan of Liverpool, Alistair Cushion of Cambridgeshire, Lisa Dickson-Battye of Sydney, Adrian Hill of Sheffield, Valérie Khourry of Paris, Bridget Mulrooney of Winchester, Lawrence Rollitt of Lulworth, Susannah Towers of Croydon and Ian Woodley of Godalming.

'Why do authors always have a spare initial in their names?' compo winners

The Reverend Paul Cockburn of Leicester, Andrew Hewson of Antibes, Amanda Hone of Gwynedd, Callum Ogilvie of Carluke, Cameron Taylor of Renfrewshire and Iorwerth Thomas of Carmarthen.

'I'll get a whole campaign out of this' compo winners

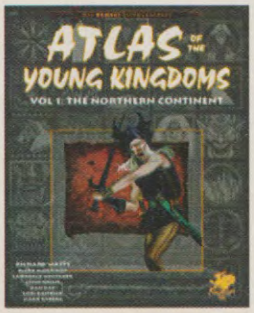
Mark Alman of Milton Abbas, Darren Ashpole of Thornborough, Steve Fitton of Rochdale, Ken Hosick of Newtownabbey, Andrew Macleod of Paisley, Rob McConnell of Wimborne, Michelle McGuigan of Sion Mills, Jon Craig Mortimer of Waterlooville, Gruffudd Prys of Bangor in Wales, Ian Revill of Alfreton, Philip Roberts of Cardigan and Vinnie Saunders of Poole.

Chaosium get busy

There are releases a'plenty planned in the Chaosium camp...

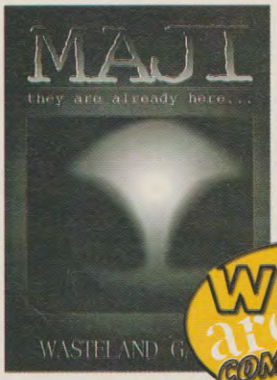
We're due to see a bumper crop of new sourcebooks from Chaosium over the coming couple of months, with new releases for all of their major roleplaying systems...

Keepers of *Call of Cthulhu* campaigns may well want to take a look at *The London Guidebook*, which is being described as a supplement which explores London in the 1920's. Combined with (the now out of print) *Green and Pleasant Land* from Games Workshop, this worthy tome should give all *CoC* ref's all the information they need to recreate the atmosphere of our nation's capital just after the 1st World War.



Just so as you don't feel left out, Chaosium are also furnishing players of the glorious *Elric* RPG with a new supplement too. *Atlas of the Young Kingdoms: The Northern Continent* is the first in a series of new *Elric* companions which, predictably given the title, detail the Young Kingdoms. This first book explains the history of the region, together with specific details on the Sighing Desert, the Weeping Waste and other nearby areas. Together with the basic geographical information comes a series of plot threads and adventure ideas which should inspire any *Elric* referee.

Finally, also due for a summer release comes *Land of Giants*, a soucebook for the re-released *Pendragon* RPG (see our review on page 56). The supplement details Scandia, Scandinavian characters and traditions, and includes a scenario which is an adaptation of the Beowolf saga.



Magic up a Maji

win! arcane COMPETITION

Wasteland Games are offering a competition prize of 10 copies of *Maji: They Are Already Here* (reviewed **arcane** 2). This sourcebook for *STOCS lite* concerns flying saucers, alien abduction, illegal government agencies and a planetary invasion by The Grays; the alien race who lost one of their boats back in Roswell. To win a copy, write and tell us one of the names of the investigation into extraterrestrial activity commissioned by the US government after the Roswell Incident of 1947. Mark your envelope 'Top Secret and Highly Confidential'.

1. No multiple entries. 2. Anyone associated with Wasteland Games, the White House or Future Publishing is ineligible for entry
3. The editor, not the President, picks the winners
4. Closing date 30th September

Wolves in space

After a year working on *Kindred: The Embrace*, the TV show inspired by White Wolf's *Vampire: The Masquerade* system, Mark Rein-Hagen is back designing roleplaying games again. In a somewhat unexpected change of direction, though, the highly regarded designer isn't returning to the modern horror genre that's been the source of White Wolf's considerable success. Instead he's working on a new science fiction game.

Although the project is only in its early stages, White Wolf is already planning war and board games, novels, computer games and even looking at the possibility of an animated TV series or movie based on the game. "I have been a hardcore SF fan since I was ten and this world is based on some ideas that I've been playing around with since I was 14 years old. I've waited a whole long time to bring them to life," says and enthusiastic Rein-Hagen. "In some ways I feel this is the pinnacle of my career as a game designer."

The as-yet unnamed game is currently scheduled for a release in early 1997.

next month in arcane

BE A BETTER ROLEPLAYER

So you think you a good roleplayer, eh? Well, we're going to tell you how to be even better in next month's cover feature. We'll explore how players should approach the characters whose lives they recreate, with plenty of advice from experienced roleplayers who have been perfecting the art for almost two decades. No roleplayer should miss it.

Suds and Sorcery

Who was it who said we should be looking to epic films for inspiration for our roleplaying campaigns? Forget that – we should be watching Neighbours, as we explain in our look at how soap operas are the ideal viewing material for all referees who've lost their muse.

mix and match

Why not have your medieval champions take down their foes with photon cannons? We examine new ways to approach technology in your roleplaying campaigns next month.

arcane 9 will be on sale Friday 12th July2

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Wraith: The Oblivion Second Edition
is a brand new-look at eternity. This harcover
tome strips the original game down to its essential elements
and rebuilds it, with all-new text, art and fiction. More
accessible than ever before, the new edition is designed to
encourage players to act, not react.
Including art by George Pratt and fiction by Rick Hautala.

Available in August.

WHITE WOLF
GAME STUDIO

Wraith: The Oblivion, Second Edition
It's not about death. It's about what comes after.

WORLD OF DARKNESS

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RETRO

DragonQuest

Designed by Eric Goldberg, Gerard Klug, David Ritchie and Edward Woods

Published by SPI First published in 1980 Now out of print

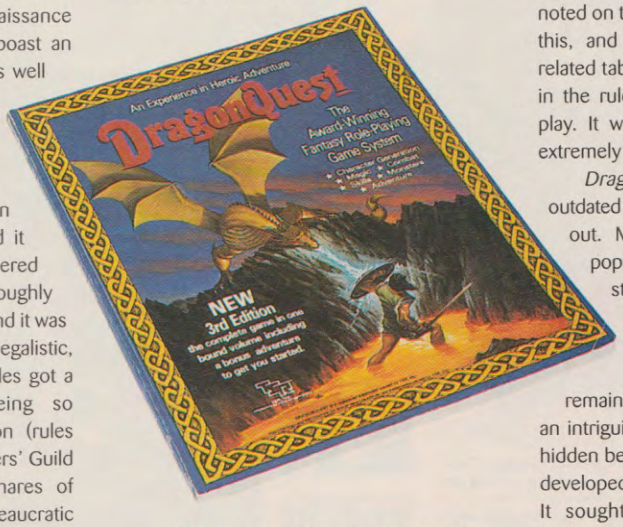
This month's monster which refuses to die is SPI's *DragonQuest*. Heidi Kaye examines this rather civilised fantasy system from the gaming archives.

DESPITE THE NAME and the crude barbarian on the cover, *DragonQuest* was anything but another *AD&D* or *RuneQuest* clone. It offered a clear and sophisticated set of rules, and it had a very distinct atmosphere all of its own. This was a roleplaying game which came in just one book, was thankfully easy to pick up and play, and yet, for its time, was incredibly innovative.

Although *DragonQuest* didn't have a specific campaign world of its own, the rules evoked a civilised Renaissance society feel. The game could boast an organised Adventurers' Guild as well as magical colleges, schools of weapon training and an extremely high level of professional classes.

The actual rules system in *DragonQuest* was so organised it was frightening. It had numbered sections and sub-sections, thoroughly cross-referenced information, and it was written in a clear, if somewhat legalistic, manner. To some extent the rules got a little carried away with being so organised: the recommendation (rules 79.2-5) that PCs sign Adventurers' Guild Contracts guaranteeing fair shares of treasure may sound like bureaucratic nonsense, especially the section which defined how the Guild should arbitrate disputes, yet this was a valid attempt to regulate gameplay at a time when players were only just beginning to find out what roleplaying was all about. The recommendation provided structure, and an effective means of keeping the game in check.

DragonQuest excelled in the area of character development, encouraging Renaissance men and women to learn a wide range of skills rather than restrict them with a defined character class. Together with learning combat skills, characters chose to join one of 12 Colleges of Magic, or acquire professional skills associated with the unusual professions of mechanician, troubadour and courtesan. A straightforward percentile system covered the resolution of magic and skill chances, with provision for fumbles, criticals and backfires.


An Experience in Heroic Adventure
DragonQuest
The Award-Winning Fantasy Role-Playing Game System
NEW
3rd Edition
the complete game in one bound volume including a bonus adventure to get you started.

Instead of advancing in levels, characters spent their experience points on increasing skills proficiencies – a system which was well ahead of its time back in 1980.

The absence of any set religion in the game added to the Renaissance feel of the rules. *DragonQuest* mentioned only the 'powers of dark and light', but there were no obtrusive alignment rules to deal with and no recourse to fighting in the name of one god or another. Consequently, adventure and interaction tended to be based on personal and social motivations.

DragonQuest was one of the very first roleplaying games to have rules for various choices of action during combat, for mêlée initiative and for formalised movement based on a hex grid. In-keeping with the rest of the rules, the combat system was pretty complex, but much of the calculation was done beforehand with the various modifiers noted on the character sheet. Because of this, and because all of the combat-related tables were together in one place in the rule book, combat was quick to play. It was also realistic, exciting and extremely deadly.

DragonQuest was not so much outdated as bought-out and then phased-out. Many of the games that are popular today focus on presenting a strong campaign background, with the rules as an almost tagged-on afterthought. *DragonQuest's* system remains eminently playable, offering an intriguing glimpse of the game world hidden beneath, itself there to be further developed and moulded by the referee. It sought to create a more logical, understandable and flexible fantasy system, and its direct style and conspicuous organisation made it an appealing option for the novice roleplayer.

Still the quest for dragons continues, with a huge demand for second-hand copies of the rules as well as a keen following on the Internet. Who knows, maybe one day a games company will take it upon itself to grace the roleplaying community with a much-deserved re-print.

An important difference which *DragonQuest* had going for it over earlier RPG systems was that experience wasn't gained for killing, or for gaining treasure. Instead, characters earned experience points for actual game hours played! That meant players gained more experience for roleplaying through a spate of political intrigue than for slaughtering a bunch of orcs.

TSR took over various SPI titles, including *DragonQuest* in the mid eighties. The game stopped being printed, and then the name *DragonQuest* was used for an unrelated TSR boardgame.

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BEYOND THE STELLAR EMPIRE

You're straight out of Space Academy and as green as the aliens. You work for no one - but someone is keen to acquire your services. Are they friend or slimy space bum?

K J C

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Then things are thrown wide open as you negotiate your missions with your bosses, be it colonisation, trade, fending off alien assaults, or going where no one has gone before.

- Upgrade your ship as you progress
- Explore a huge, ever expanding playing area
- Colonise New Worlds

- Get embroiled in affiliation politics
- Probe planets, search for new ones, or land and confront the local denizens
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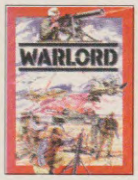

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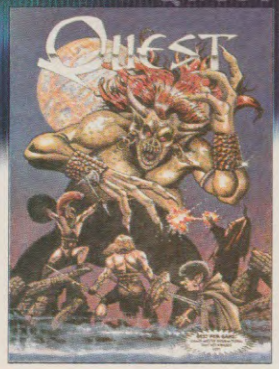

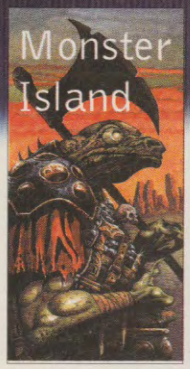

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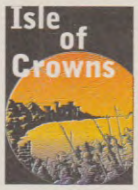

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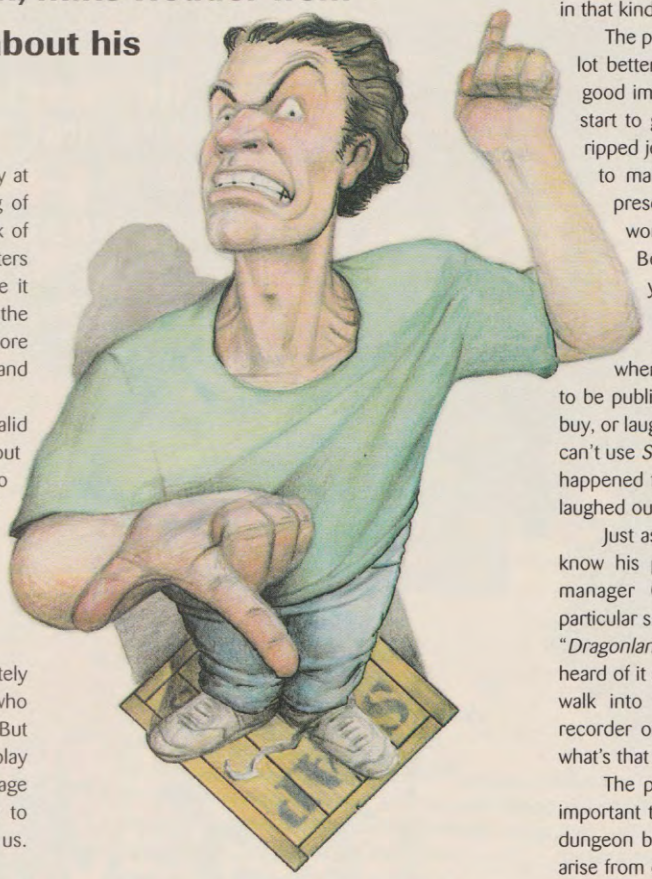
COLUMN

On The Soapbox

Just what is it about the gaming industry that really gets your goat? Get on the arcane soapbox and air your views! This month, *Mike Hodder* from Birmingham worries about his street cred.



THE BIGGEST PROBLEM facing our industry at the moment is not the over-zealous pricing of even the most basic of items. It's not the ilk of players who do nothing but send their characters off to kill anything that moves or looks like it might have the potential. It's not even the religious zealots who think that if a dice has more than six sides it's the spawn of the Devil and should be melted down forthwith.

Don't get me wrong. These are valid concerns for all of us who are serious about roleplaying, and they need addressing (and to some extent have been in earlier issues of **arcane**). However, it's not *the* thing, it's not *the* burning issue which all of us gamers should be fighting to overcome. Nope, that title belongs to...

Image.

Now, I know many of you will immediately cry: "Yeah, there are all those other idiots who think we're all nerds, but *it's just not true!*" But it's not those 'other people', the types who play rugby instead of roleplaying games and engage in motor-cross instead of *Magic*, who are to blame for our bad image problem. Oh no, it's us. We're the ones who are creating it.

Where do you buy your roleplaying systems and your booster packs of cards? I bet it's a dingy back-street shop with subdued lighting and a job-lot of posters featuring scantily-clad warrior-women adorning the windows. Hardly a cool place to be seen, is it? With that kind of trash plastered all over the shop it's not surprising that there's a surfeit of young males playing these games and very few women. I don't expect these establishments to look like Harrods, but for as long as we buy our gaming gear in small dingy shops our hobby will be seen in that way.

"As long as we buy our gear in dingy shops our hobby will be seen in that way."

The people who sell us this stuff could do a lot better as well. Ripped jeans and chains a good impression does not make. Before you start to go off on one, let me point out that ripped jeans and the odd chain go some way to making up my apparel, but I wouldn't present myself in such a manner if I were working in the service industry. Why? Because it doesn't look inviting – you've got to conform to compete, people. And to top it off, I'm sick of getting condescending looks whenever I ask a question – I do not need to be publicly humiliated over what I choose to buy, or laughed at because I don't know that you can't use *Star Trek* cards in a *Magic* deck (which happened to a poor lad of eight or so who was laughed out of my local store in tears).

Just as bad is the shop owner who doesn't know his product. I recently asked the store manager (no less) whether he stocked a particular supplement along with his *AD&D* gear. "*Dragonlance*," he replied, dumfounded, "Never heard of it mate." I ask you, would you expect to walk into Dixons to enquire about a video recorder only to be met with the reply: "VHS, what's that then?" I think not.

The problems which we view as being so important to this hobby – overpricing, ignorant dungeon bashers, religious condemnation – all arise from our image problem, a problem which we don't seem to be bothered to do anything about. We can't go on blaming our image on others' incorrect perceptions of what we get up to – their perceptions are based on what they see. In a world where image and looks count for everything, we should endeavour to be a Cindy Crawford, not a Roseanne Barr.

ON THE SOAPBOX is a new column where you, the reader, and even industry luminaries get to discuss views on the roleplaying hobby. These views are not necessarily the views of the editorial team, nor of arcane. If you've got something you'd like to contribute, send between 650 and 750 words to: On the Soapbox, arcane, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. And if you've got a reply to Mike Hodder's column this month, feel free to write to the arcane scribblings letters pages.

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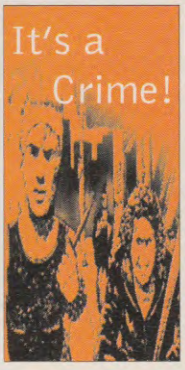

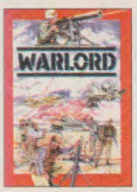

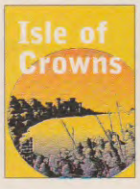

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COLUMN

Are you sad?

This issue, I am going to put the idea that roleplayers are sad, no-life geeks to rest. Answer the follow questions honestly, and add up your score to discover your Anorak Quotient.

Andrew Rilstone

Andrew is the editor of *Interactive Fantasy*, the journal of roleplaying and story-making systems, and is also a regular contributor to arcane.

1: When do you roleplay?
- A: On Tuesday nights. (2)
- B: On Monday and Thursday nights. (3)
- C: Whenever we can get a bunch of people together who feel like it. (1)
- D: On Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday nights, and all day at weekends. (4)

2: What is your favourite character?
- A: A bare-chested barbarian prince who is seeking the lost crown of his kingdom. (2)
- B: A wizard who specialises in fire magic. (3)
- C: A young thief trying to come to terms with the cruelty he suffered while he was being brought up by his wicked uncle. (1)
- D: A 17th level multi-classed librarian/assassin with a +5 Sword of Spreading. (4)

3: What do you and your friends talk about after the game has finished?
- A: Whether the referee was right to rule that white dragons are not vulnerable to 'Snowstorm' spells. (3)
- B: The mythic significance of the troll guarding the entrance to dragon queen's harem. (2)
- C: Last month's *Sandman.* (1)
- D: Talk? (4)

4: What do you do apart from play RPGs?
- A: Play collectable card games. (3)
- B: Surf the Internet. (2)
- C: Play cricket, attend origami classes, eat in Mongolian restaurants, listen to opera. (1)
- D: I'm sorry, I don't understand the question. (4)

5: What is your favourite game?
- A: *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons.* (3)
- B: 1st Edition *Dungeons & Dragons,* but only with the second edition of *Unearthed Arcana* and the modifications printed in *Dragon* #67. (4)
- C: My own home-grown version of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* which has a more realistic combat system and 47 new character classes. (2)
- D: One with a referee who really knows how to create an interesting scenario. (1)

6: What do you think is the best thing about roleplaying games?
- A: You get to kill things! (4)
- B: You get to escape from your boring life into something more interesting. (3)
- C: You get to make up creative stories and fascinating characters. (2)
- D: You get to spend time doing something fun with your mates. (1)

7: What is the best fantasy book ever written?
- A: Sir Edmund Spencer's *Fairy Queen.* (1)
- B: J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings.* (2)
- C: David Eddings' *Belgariad.* (3)
- D: Weiss and Hickman's *Dragonlance* series, all 267 volumes. (4)

8: What is *Babylon 5?*
- A: The best piece of TV SF there has ever been, showing *Star Trek* up for the puerile, unrealistic nonsense it is. (4)
- B: Puerile, unrealistic nonsense, an insult to everything Gene Roddenbury achieved. (3)
- C: An intriguing picture of what life in 2259 will probably be like. (2)
- D: A TV programme. (1)

9: Will Lois ever marry Clark?
- A: Yes. (3)
- B: No. (2)
- C: She already did, in the classic 1947 story 'How do I spank a super powered baby?' which also introduced purple kryptonite. (4)
- D: Lois who? (1)

Anorak Quotient

Over 30: All you do is play RPGs. You are more interested in rule books and dice than in stories or characters. Gaming has nothing to do with the real world, which is just as well because you don't know what that is. You are the person for whom the expression 'get a life' was invented.

21 – 30: You are a fanboy. You buy games you never intend to play and get irritated when people mix up *Chivalry and Sorcery 1st Edition* with *Chivalry and Sorcery 2nd Edition.* When you grow up you would like to work in the games industry. You should get out more.

12 – 20: You spend a lot of time playing RPGs, but there are other things which are even more important to you. You like games which have got some connection with real life. On a cloudy day, you could be mistaken for someone normal.

11 or less: You are not at all sad. You do things apart from play roleplaying games. It's even possible that you have a girlfriend (unless, of course, you *are* a girlfriend, which would explain it). What are you reading this magazine for, you smug bastard?

MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR

Just why is it that magic fails to excite in roleplaying games these days? Paul Petter

Paul Daniels has got a lot to answer for. He's made magic mundane. All right, so we still don't know how he gets up to all of those tricks of his – we still gawp upon occasion and think, 'How the Hell did he do that?' But let's face it – magic just isn't, well, magical any more.

Okay, so I'm talking about a type of magic that we don't associate with roleplaying games – the magical acts performed by Mr Daniels and his ilk are cheap stunts designed to fool the eye into believing the impossible has happened, whereas the average *AD&D* magic user will happily create fire out of air and send it catapulting towards his foes. However, magic in many roleplaying games has also become mundane. We speak of Magic Points as if they are a currency and spell lists as if they are shopping lists.

No longer does the casting of a spell conjure up images of extraordinary power and mysterious energies. Magic is, in most of our campaigns, little more than a device which is used to perform certain tasks, such as killing a monster, opening a locked door, providing light in the dark, and ensuring that those hidden enemies don't hear our approach. The magician in the party is little more than a means to a set of rather boring ends. This certainly wasn't the intention of the creators of fantasy roleplaying, so why should we perpetuate it? The fact is, we shouldn't. Plain and simple.

Magic's become dull – so isn't it about time you thought about injecting some mysticism into the magical elements of your campaigns? It may sound like a great deal of hard work, but I'm sure you'll agree your game deserves it.

There are a few roleplaying systems which have a magic system but no spell lists. Perhaps the most obvious example is *Mage: The Ascension*, though *Feng Shui*'s magic system (if you can call it that) works without defined spells. It is, however, a somewhat slapstick system. Check out **arcane** 1 for our *Feng Shui* review.

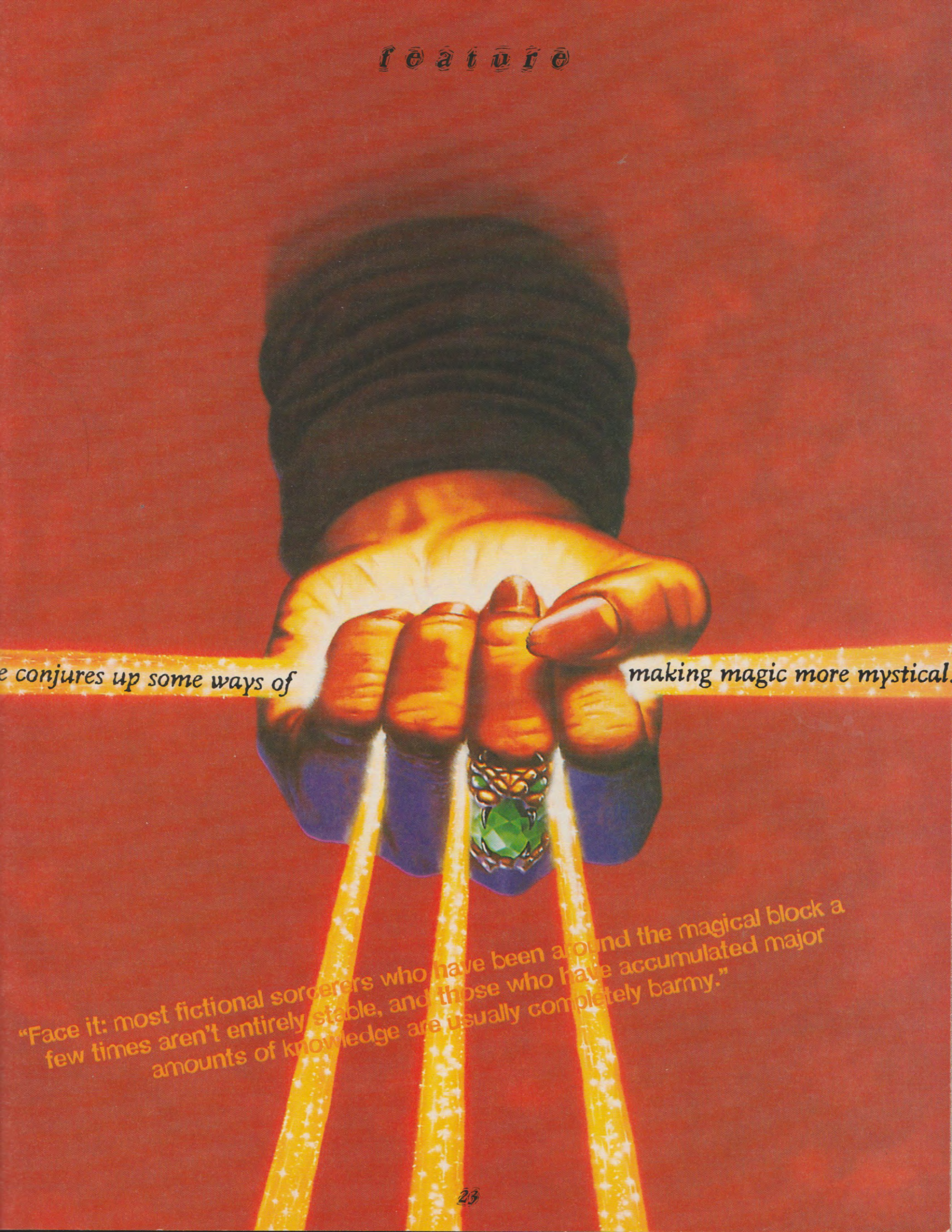
Playing With Fire

The introduction of magic into roleplaying games owes much to the works of Jack Vance, who in his *Dying Earth* stories (first published way back in 1950) developed a style of languid irony that has since been recaptured by future-magic games such as *Shadowrun*, and in a darker fashion by *Mage: The Ascension*. Vance's depiction of magic in a far-future Earth heavily influenced the game rules for the original *Dungeons & Dragons*.

The early magic users in roleplaying games were created with the Vancian idea that a limit – based on experience and intelligence – was imposed on the number of spells and the extent of their effects that a magician could learn. This worked up to a point, but required heavy-handed rulings to limit the development of potentially over-powerful characters – the argument about *AD&D* magicians not being able to wear armour carries on 23 years after the original ruling! Spells were modelled around the fantasy works of Howard, Camp, Pratt and Leiber, with some fantasy wargame effects thrown in for good measure. The development of a magician character was seen simply as the accumulation of more spells, with no provision for his or her increased understanding of the nature of the magical universe, or even personal and mental advancement. It was limiting, and ultimately limited in its application. Just like the magic which was being used, magic users were prone to being lifeless and uninteresting – something they certainly should not be!

I Am Not A Magical Battery!

And it is this 'style' of magical development which is reflected in many of the games we play, with *AD&D* being the major culprit. Relegating the magic user to a magical battery which gets charged up each day, ready to cast whatever spells he knows at the time until he's 'used up' (at which point he's of little use to the party), is to do the class no justice. Addressing



"Face it: most fictional sorcerers who have been around the magical block a few times aren't entirely stable, and those who have accumulated major amounts of knowledge are usually completely barmy."

magic in this way is far too clinical, it spoils the mysterious elements which should exist in a game's magic system, and it makes playing an *AD&D* mage pretty bloody boring until he's built up a large spell book.

Other games don't take such a practical approach to magic in their rules. *RuneQuest*, in splitting the magic system up into shamanistic, ritual, divine and sorcery magic, provides scope for more diverse character types and, for the first time, introduces the idea that magicians don't just miraculously 'do' these spells, but that they draw upon a mystical energy which they transform to their ends.

This is a hugely important point, and one which any referee who's playing a game that has a magic system (or, hey, if you're using Lee Brimmicombe-Wood's feature starting on page 28 to design your own game) should consider: just where does the magical energy in your game come from? *Star Wars* gets it right (not because it's a brilliant system, but simply because it had the films to draw upon). The Force in the *Star Wars* mythos is an intangible entity, almost, a Mother Nature that Luke and the gang can draw upon to affect the tangible world around them. Luke doesn't cast spells, he channels the Force to his will.

Level systems and spells, however incongruous these are with the concept of a 'power which cannot be fully understood', can be married with the notion of a higher energy – it's simply a case of being a little bit more inventive when describing the accumulation of magical power.

And this in itself can make for some excellent roleplaying sessions. It's so much more interesting if, before progressing to the next level of magical proficiency, the magic using character's got to do more than just gain X experience points and visit the local high-ranking magic user down the road so he can ransack his weighty spell book. Journeys to places where magical power manifests itself in the gaming world, or even to other planes of existence where the 'inner eye' is opened by the sights there, could make for some intensely thrilling scenarios, and at the same time give the magic system more significance to the campaign.

Of course, there's a problem here in that such scenarios are geared entirely around the magic user character, but any creative referee should be able to get around this somehow (the 'magical locale' may be a place where items belonging to the party become enchanted, and the 'other plane' may be where curses which affect other characters can be dispelled). In fact, isn't it in the party's best interests to ensure that their magic user travels upwards through the magical ranks? And I'm sure they must owe him at least a favour or three...

You Get What You Pay For

There are a number of devices which a referee can use to make the application of magic in the gaming world more mysterious, and something which should be revered rather than spent willy-nilly. I like the idea of magical balance – a kind of 'what you take out of the magical pool, you're going to have to pay for in the end' approach, which will make the magic user think twice every time it comes to casting that Magic Missile or Fireball.

Think of it like this: the magical force which powers all spells (and which is channelled by the magic user) surely can't be infinite? (Well, yes, it could, but pretend it's not for now, okay?) Whenever a magic user casts a spell he's using up some tiny fragment of that energy – if they're all at it 12 hours a day, 30 days a month, year in, year out, just how long is it going to be before some sorcerer somewhere chants his mantra only to find that the magical well has dried up? By getting magic users to replace the magical energy in some manner you make the system more believable, and, far more importantly, you make the magic-using character think about what he's doing each time he casts a spell. Magic should be a double-edged sword, so to speak – no magic-using character should ever be able to understand it fully, and, equally, they should never be able to master it fully. There should always be a means of pay-back in a magic system.

Just how you go about making the magic user pay for using the magical energies is down to you. He may have to devote hours of his time to meditating and pouring his own energies back into the ether (a 'hibernation' period once per year, say), or it may be more dramatic – he might be physically weakened by the effort as, during the time when he's drawing magical energy out, the hungry swirl of energies is pulling his will power back through to feed upon. The more powerful the spell, the more he's drained. *AD&D* players, and those of you who play games in which there are magic points or the equivalent, have already got a system in place to use – simply give magic points a secondary meaning: the nearer he is to rock-bottom, the closer he is to unconsciousness. It shouldn't be too much effort on the part of the referee to build in some ad hoc rules to take care of this extra dimension to magic points, and any player who's remotely reasonable should happily swallow the concept.

Early *Babylonian* texts give a good indication of what magic is all about. The hero Marduk is granted the 'power that would cause every command he spoke to be followed by the effect which he intended to produce'.

arcane office favourite spell straw poll, part one: Paul's all-time fav' spell just has to be Transmute Stone to Mud in the original *D&D* rules (and, of course, its reverse). Cast Stone to Mud under your enemy's feet, watch him sink in a couple of, er, feet, then cast Mud to Stone to trap him where he stands. Now fire crossbow bolts (or get the party's dwarf to do it), until said enemy is toast.

"*RuneQuest*... introduces the idea that magicians don't just miraculously 'do' these spells, but that they draw upon a mystical energy."

for sale: wizard's tower

There's nothing that's more stereotyped when it comes to the abode of a wizard than the tower. Just why would a magic user want to live in a tower? There's no reason whatsoever above and beyond the fact that it's easily defensible. That is, by traditional means (soldiers and archers). Magicians would surely employ magical defences instead – they'd have no need for strong stone walls when their magical walls would do just as well if not better.

So, where else would they stash their eyes of newt and all the rest of it? Probably somewhere as inconspicuous as possible – a humble cottage or a terraced house. Or maybe the more extrovert would have a flying fortress (check out the Stormburg Encounter in arcane 4). When you're coming up with ideas for places in which to house your game's wizards, think of more interesting places than the tower, and bear in mind that the magic user would be using what he has at his disposal to make the place secure – in other words, he'd be using his magic.

A Tatt' And A Nose-Ring

Another principle which is worth serious consideration is that of mental stability. Surely, the more magic users come into contact with the magical forces, the more they learn about 'the way the universe works'. And the more time they spend locked away on their own studying eldritch lore, the more they're going to end up going around the bend. Think of *Call of Cthulhu* – the more the characters learn about the *Cthulhu* mythos, the closer they are to being shipped off to the asylum. This tool really should be implemented in other games, especially fantasy ones.

Face it: most fictional sorcerers who have been around the magical block a few times aren't entirely stable, and those who have accumulated major amounts of knowledge are usually completely barmy. I'm not saying that you should impose insanity on experienced magic users, but they should pick up quirks and imbalances along the way – with each level gained, say, they should pick a new quirk. These could be phobias, or fetishes, or the inability to speak of certain things with 'mere mortals' who 'just don't want to know'. This will not only help to make magic more revered, and perhaps feared, by the magic user, but it will also make the magic user a more revered and perhaps feared member of the adventuring party.

One of the best examples I can think of is Felice in the four books which make up Julian May's *Saga of the Exiles*. She starts off pretty mad anyhow, but the more she develops her extraordinary mind powers, the more she goes right off her trolley. She picks up loads of foibles along the way, and eventually becomes an entirely distinct character from the rest of the (rather barmy) bunch May describes in her books.

Diversity should be positively encouraged in player characters. Get them to come up with ways that magic has affected their characters – not only the magic user, but the others too. Maybe in being so close to a rising star in the magic world they've been tainted by the magic he uses, or maybe their magical items have had a profound psychological affect on them. Magic users shouldn't all be staff-toting old fools – they should be as diverse as the spells they cast and the forces which guide them.

As they progress as magic users, have your players become more extreme in their appearance: face paint, piercings, nakedness – anything to get over the impression of being above the norm, someone who's become closer to the forces which hold the universe together. The players will have a field day coming up with more and more bizarre traits, and the roleplaying situations which could and should transpire will be great fun to run.

And For My Next Trick...

Which brings us neatly on to another important point: how magic is integrated into the campaign world. The two extremes here are the typical *AD&D* campaign where every sixth person is a magic user and where magic is seen as a commodity like any other, and the *Call of Cthulhu* or *Don't Look Back*-style campaign, which are both based in an approximation of the real world (where, as far as 99.9 per cent of the population is concerned, magic is something that Paul Daniels does). And then, of course, there are a million points in between.

I like the idea of a world where magic is accepted as a reality, but where its use, and its users, are feared. This creates a tension in the gaming world which can, again, be fun to roleplay. Exceptions to the rule should be par for the course, by which I mean it's essential to have people in your campaign who deviate from the norm (maybe they really hate magic users, maybe they love 'em). Overall I think the most playable situation (in terms of generating a good time when gaming) is one in which the players aren't always seen as the good guys, where they have to earn respect, proving that, in the case of the magic user, the source of the populace's fear isn't as bad as they think it is.

"Magic should be a double-edged sword... no magic-using character should be able to master it fully."

Let me clarify: make the magic users in your parties work at proving that magic is A Good Thing when they're wearing nothing but body paint in a town tavern. You'll have a barrel of laughs. The prevalence of magic within the societal make-up is something that should be established early in the campaign: can the party wander along any high street in any city and be guaranteed of coming across a magician's school and a potion shop? I think that if this is the case then you're making a grave mistake – again, it comes down to mystifying magic. If every kid over the age of ten wants to be a magic user when he grows up, you're doing something wrong. A minimalist approach generally works best in fantasy campaigns – too much magic results in familiarity, and that automatically erodes any sense of magic being mystical.

arcane office favourite spell straw poll, part two: Andy's all-time fav' spell is Healthy Glow from FASA's *Shadowrun*. A healing spell, Healthy Glow has absolutely no game effect, but allows instantaneous recovery from the bloodshot eyes, pasty complexion and other unpleasant physical evidence of hangovers or other self-induced binges...
(If only – Paul.)

Not Another Shield +3!

This should also be the case with magic items. Now, the whole idea of campaign balance and preventing the proliferation of magic items spoiling your games will be covered in a future issue of **arcane**, but it's worth pointing out that magic items should be used sparingly in your scenarios. Throwing a Sword +2 against Dragons in every room makes for an ultimately dull game – the thrills your players are going to have when it comes to the Great Quest for

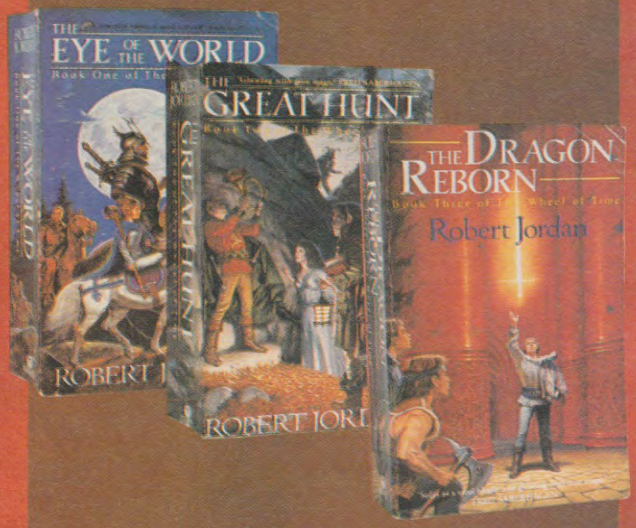
magic from upon high

Magic is not always practiced by wizards, or course. In the *AD&D* games alone, there are other magic-using classes. A distinction should be made, however, between magic user types and cleric types. The latter use magic, but the source of their spells is their gods, rather than any 'magical energy source'. Consequently, religious magic should be treated differently in your games.

Religious magic, ie. the spells and enchantments cast by followers of a faith, has the potential to be every bit as mystical as traditional wizardry-style magic. More so, in fact, because of the divine associations. Priests and other religious characters should be encouraged to break away from the meek, mild-mannered stereotype who isn't much good to the party when he's not swinging his mace in between casting healing spells. How about making these characters zealots, forever shoving their views down the throats of whoever they meet, or warriors of the faith who think they're in the gaming world for one purpose: to deliver all miscreants from evil?

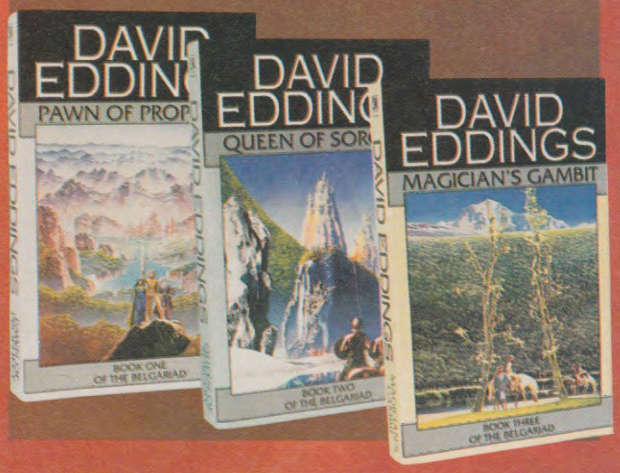
magical tomes

Okay, so there are more fantasy books on the shelves which feature magic than we've, er, read. But there are books and then there are books, as it were, and we think that these are the ones you should be tracking down if you're after top-class inspiration for employing magic in your games...



All are 'free-form' magic systems. *The Belgariad* is the most unstructured, relying simply on the magician's will. The *Earthsea* magic is based around knowing the language used to create the world and 'true names'. In *The Wheel Of Time* men and women use a different source of mystic power to weave 'threads' of different elements (spirit, air, water, etc.) to create different effects. This is also a good example of an original background and premise for magic, because the male source has been corrupted, so all male magicians eventually go mad. All three magic systems have dangers and costs, which is also a vital element of a good magic system.

You might also want to check out Jack Vance's *Dying Earth* series (as explained in the main body of the feature – see page 22), and other 'classic' fantasy novels such as the *Conan* books and, of course, *The Lord of the Rings*.



the Magical Item are inevitably squashed when they discover that the thing they've spent four months searching for could have been easily picked up down Ye Magike Shoppe or in the nearest dungeon (and speaking of dungeons take a look at Steve Faragher's explanation of why dungeon bashes are great, starting on page 32). Unless, of course, you ensure that the item of their quest is monumentally powerful – at which point campaign balance questions come into play and everything starts to get completely out of hand.

So, keep the magic item quotient low, I say. You want your players to get excited when they find a Sword +1 (or the game equivalent in whatever system you're playing). And if a magic user discovers a scroll, inscribed upon which is a mere first-level spell, then he should be pretty bloody joyous too. In fantasy fiction (and I'm including historical fantasy such as Malory's *Mort d'Arther* here), magical items, potions and the like are incredibly rare. Take a leaf out *Call of Cthulhu's* book (as it were) on this score, and give magical items a life of their own – they should be dangerous things to use, ever-likely to do something completely unexpected.

Although it's not really magical, one of the most fun items I've come across in fiction is the *Lazy Gun* in Iain M. Banks' *Against a Dark Background* – it has a completely random effect each time it's fired; sometimes it fires a round of flechetts, other times it turns the target into a fry-pan. Also, as I've already mentioned, the mere possession of a magic item should have an influence on the character that owns it, and this effect should be roleplayed by the player involved: perhaps the item makes him incredibly jealous over it, or maybe it saps his strength each time it's used – the possibilities are endless.

Pulling The Hare Out Of The Hat

By now you may be thinking, 'This is all well and good, but my gaming group is quite happy to treat magic as nothing more than a means to an end – why on Earth should I give a damn whether it's mystical or not?' To which I answer: because it makes your campaigns so much more fun to play in the long term. Encouraging a level of awe on the part of the players whenever their characters come across magic in one of its many forms makes for a much more atmospheric roleplaying session, and the suspension of belief that we all quest after in our gaming periods becomes more of an attainable prospect.

Also, those players who play magic-using characters will have a far better time; they'll be given much more scope to develop their characters in new and exciting ways – ways which, perhaps, weren't available to them beforehand. By making magic more mystical, you're making magic-using classes more mystical, and therefore a more appealing class to play.

In this feature I've tended to stick with the *AD&D* model for magic use and integration in a campaign. Yes, there are dozens of new magical systems which need to be covered, and indeed they shall be in future articles, but it's the older *AD&D* model which has the most problems (besides being the game most roleplayers still play). However, the principles I've delved into here are applicable to any game which uses a magical system.

Whatever game you play, however familiar you are with the basis and the nuances of the magic system the game uses, take time to step back and ask yourself: 'What could I do to make magic more exciting in my gaming sessions?' Magic as a utility for creating interesting roleplaying situations has enormous potential, and it's definitely worthwhile making an effort to get this element of your campaign spot-on.

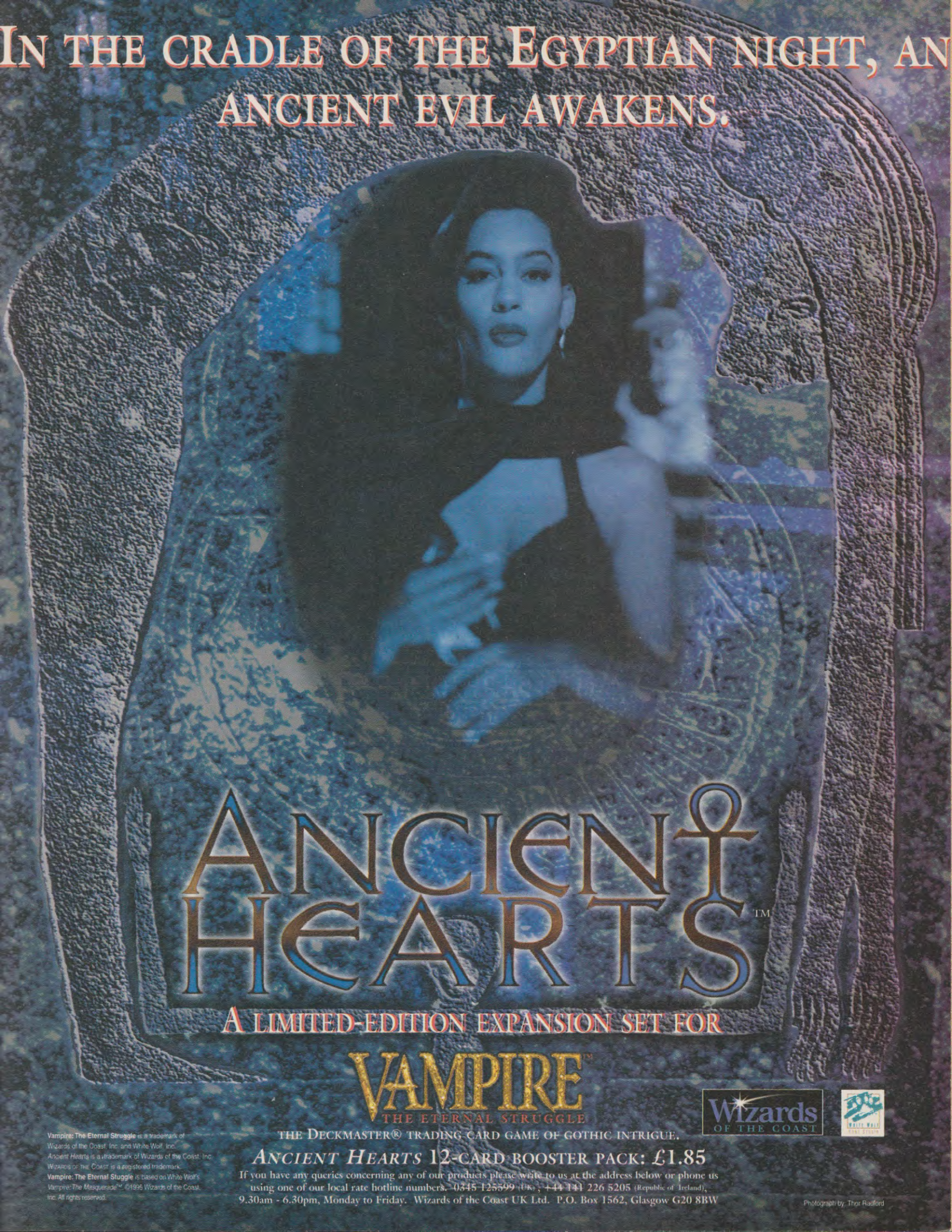
Next Month in arcane...

In next month's cover feature, we'll be taking a look at how you can play roleplaying games better. All of us who play (as opposed to referee) the multitude of RPGs on the market can improve, in one way or another, so we've got the entire **arcane** team together to come up with dozens of suggestions on how you can do exactly that. So, don't miss this essential knowledge when **arcane** 9 hits the streets on Friday 12 July.

Special Thanks

Our thanks to Mark Green who helped to compile some of the background material for this feature.

IN THE CRADLE OF THE EGYPTIAN NIGHT, AN ANCIENT EVIL AWAKENS.



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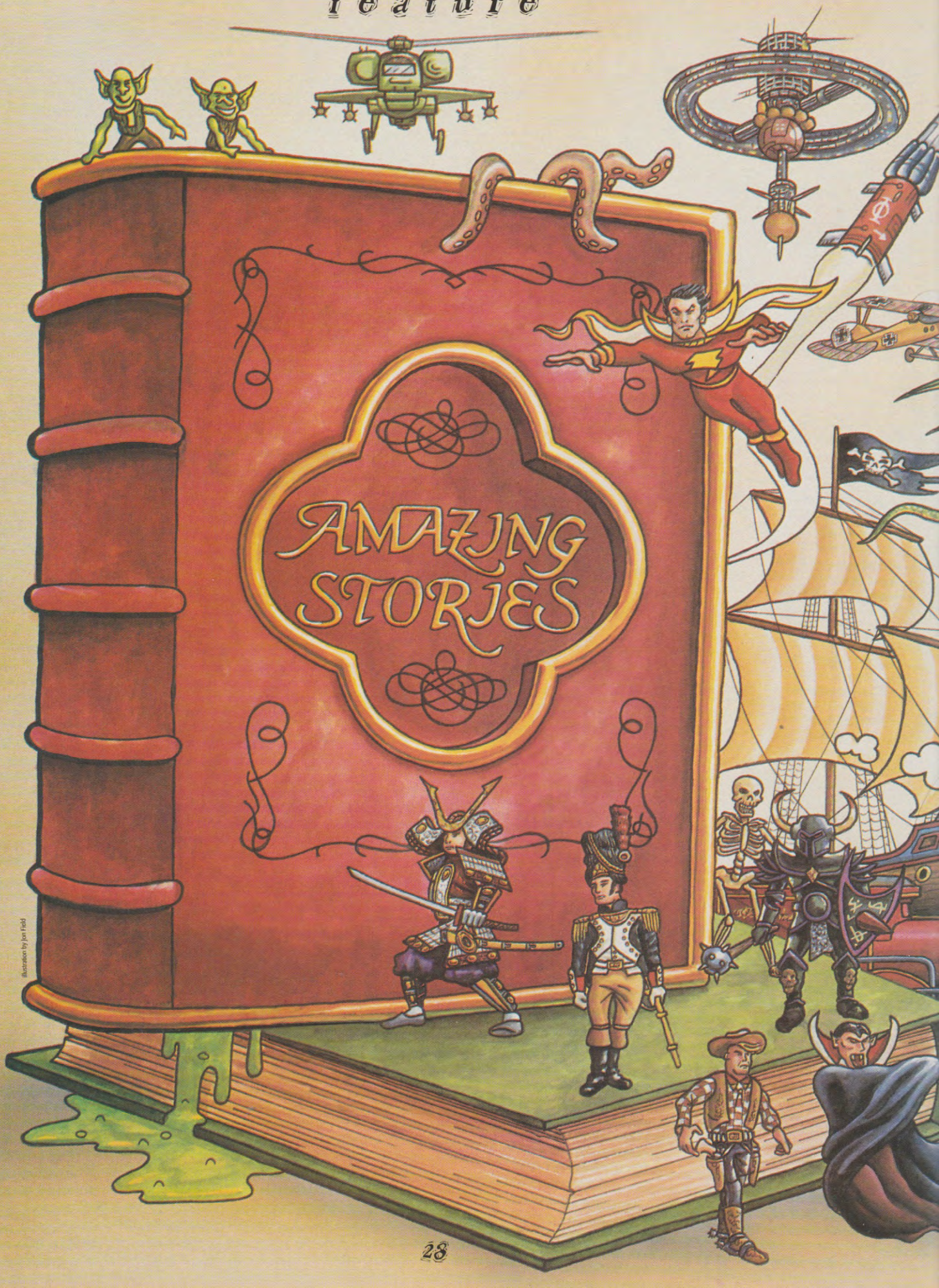


illustration by Jon Field

DO IT YOURSELF PART 3: AND ON THE SIXTH DAY, GOD CREATED MAN!

In part three of our series on designing your very own RPG, Lee Brimmicombe-Wood looks at how characters fit into your campaign background, at their skills and attributes and how to develop rules for using them.

How good are your characters? If a referee gives them a task to perform, are they likely to succeed? If they succeed, how well will they do? These are some of the basic questions that a game system, with its mechanics for resolving action, is designed to answer.

Action packed

The term 'action' is widely used in roleplaying. Roleplayers like to break down the activities of their characters into discrete packages, or 'actions', and use the game mechanics to determine their success or failure. All of us are familiar with games that list attributes or skills, and assign values to determine how good a player's character is at certain tasks. If a player has to climb a sheer cliff face, you count it as a climbing 'action' and use the Climbing skill; if you want to check for traps, you need to use a detect trap 'action' and an appropriate perception skill.

Of course, real life doesn't work like that. Real people don't break down all their activities into actions, and real-life tasks often require the use of several abilities at once. The game concept of the 'action', rolling up a bunch of physical or mental processes into a single activity, is a simplification – possibly a necessary one – for roleplaying.

If the concept of the action is somewhat artificial, then so is the notion of 'skills' and that of 'attributes'. Many game systems use these conventions, defining 'attributes' as some kind of base-line natural capabilities, such as a character's strength or speed, while 'skill' is defined as a learned ability. However, although these gaming categorisations make roleplaying neat and tidy, they make little sense if examined in more detail.

In real life, these different categories overlap or blend into each other and it is very hard to make a separation. But in games, extremely broad categories are created, such as *Runequest's* 'Dexterity'

When categorising skills, be careful how you divide them up, particularly in the case of technical skills. I'm sure I'm not the only *Traveller* player whose character was a brilliant ship engineer who could fix a jump drive just like that, but who would be flummoxed by simple electrical tasks.

Root And Branch Skills

One approach to categorising skills and attributes is to use a 'root and branch' system. In this, a broad skill category can have any number of branching speciality 'sub-skills' within it, allowing for subtle differentiation between players with similar skills. With this kind of approach, you can have two characters with a 'root' skill in Firearms, one of which is expert in the branching sub-skill of Pistol and the other in the speciality of Rifle.

Should you have missed the earlier parts of Lee's feature on designing your own roleplaying game, do not fear, for you can get back issues of **arcane** to complete the set – turn to page 53 to find out how you can place your order. So as you know, the first part (**arcane** 6) dealt with the basic considerations you should make before starting to create your own game, and part two (**arcane** 7) looked at core system rules.

attribute, which goes beyond hand-eye coordination to include the character's physical agility and grace. Often, the categories used grossly simplify things. Take the example of 'Strength', which is found in almost every roleplaying game. On the face of it, this would seem to be the easiest physical attribute to measure, since you can base it on press-weights or the like. But as any Olympic athlete will tell you, there is an extremely big difference in the *kinds* of strength used by, say, a weightlifter, a shotputter and a hammer-thrower. They are not necessarily equivalent.

Get back to reality

By definition, everything in a game system is a simplification of reality. With a few exceptions, real people don't possess discrete skills and attributes that can be easily measured. Nevertheless, we also recognise that in real life some people are stronger or weaker at certain things than others. The differences may be obvious or subtly shaded, but are nevertheless real and a system should reflect that.

So, systems use some crude form of abstraction to delineate the differences between characters. The degree of abstraction and detail can vary widely from system to system. For instance, in some science-fiction games, science skills are broken down into separate disciplines, each with a number of sub-skill 'specialities'. But in others, science is lumped together into a single, overarching 'Science' skill. Both approaches are perfectly valid, depending on the background.

"Everything in a game is a simplification of reality... real people don't possess skills that can be easily measured."

Given that most systems (and probably yours too) break down a player character's attributes and skills into discrete categories, what should those categories be? Well, that largely depends on your campaign. A lot of games use fairly similar conventions; attributes are frequently values such as 'Strength', 'Dexterity', 'Health' and 'Intelligence', while skills often include weapon ability, knowledge skills and the like. But in your design you are not limited by convention, so you should feel free to categorise as you see fit. The important thing is that the categories reflect the most important or essential elements of the campaign background.

Attributes for the next generation

For instance, recently I created a *Star Trek: The Next Generation* roleplaying game system for my roleplaying group. Among the base attributes I left out were physical categories such as 'Strength', 'Dexterity' and 'Agility' because they didn't seem to be particularly important factors in the TV show. However, for those players who wanted it, I included attributes such as 'Extreme Strength' as separate, special abilities. I also lumped all the scientific disciplines into a single 'Science' attribute, which seemed to be appropriate given the TV show's rationale that all the Starfleet characters are highly trained scientists with a broad knowledge of the sciences.

Taking another example: in an Animé-based system I once created, I left out 'Intelligence' as an attribute, which can be interpreted either as a piece of satire, or an observation that in the wacky, action-based campaign I'd created, differences in intelligence didn't matter very much. The rest of the attributes and skills in the game were very action-oriented, such as 'Reflexes', 'Agility' and 'Hand Coordination'. Of course, to match the source material, I couldn't help including the attribute 'Cuteness' as well!

A measure of your success

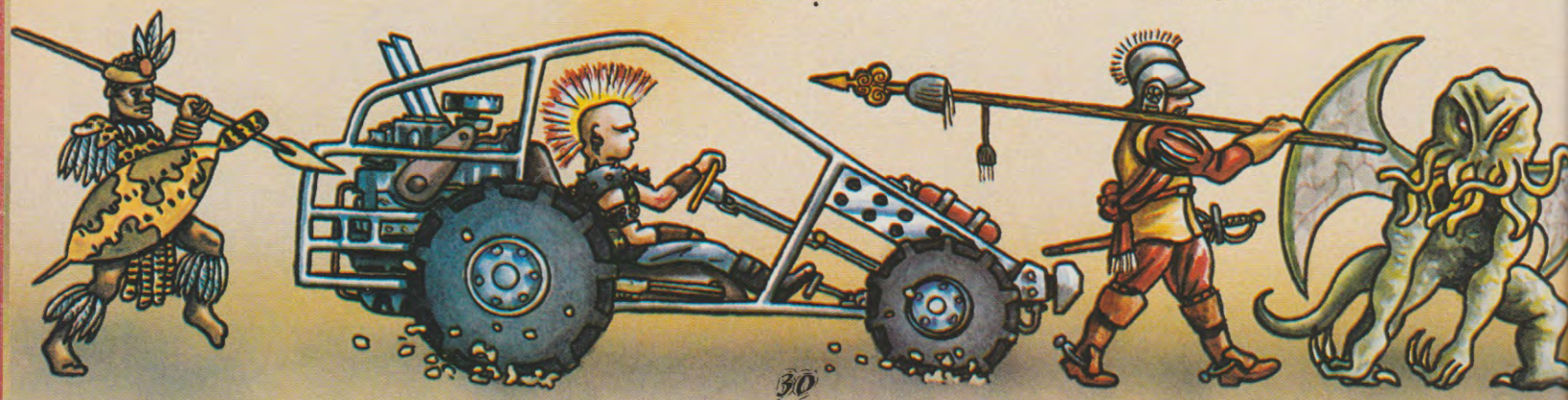
However you categorise attributes and skills, their function is to measure a character's performance. When a skill or attribute is employed in a game, it is usually to do one or more of three things. First, to measure whether an action is a success. Second, to measure the degree of success – how well the character did. And third, to be used in a conflict with someone, or something, else's attributes or skills.

As for game mechanics, there are probably a million different ways to determine success or failure, and half of those haven't even been invented yet! Probability numbers, dice conventions,

Making Clever Rules

A lot of roleplayers don't like thinking too hard about a system when they play, either for reasons of laziness, or because they don't want to deal with the nitty gritty of a game's mechanics when they are playing their role. However, there is a tendency in some systems to force the player to play the system as much as the game. For instance, in one prototype system I recently tested, attackers in a sword fight could decide for themselves how difficult they wished to make their sword attacks – the defender then had to use the same difficulty to parry. This neat mechanic allowed skilful fighters to outfight less skilled ones simply by selecting a high difficulty for each attack. Clever, huh?

The problem with this mechanic, though, was that some players didn't want to think too hard about the system during a fight. It either provided too much choice, which made them dither, or was simply intrusive. For some of these people, all they wanted to do was roll a simple success/fail dice. Designers should always remember that with any system, clever mechanics have to survive being used by ordinary players – the kind of players who just want to get on with the game rather than explore the richness and choice offered by the system mechanics.



Bell Curves Versus Linear Probabilities

Some games, such as *Runequest*, use a simple 1-100 probability number for their skill system, to be rolled under on D100. This means that as skills progress, they do so in a linear fashion, with each point of skill being a percentile of chance. Many other games though, such as *GURPS* with its 3D6 rolls, prefer to use the totalled roll of multiple dice. In this case, the chances of rolling particular numbers follows a bell curve, as do the relative worth of skills. This last approach is popular because it seems intuitively right – skills and attributes rise rapidly in value until they reach a certain point, and then become subject to a law of diminishing returns. Much like life, really.

charts, use of card draws – all of these are possible methods of resolving tasks or conflicts. There are plenty of examples in games systems past and present to take as inspiration for your core rules, and although I haven't got space to discuss them all here it's well worth looking at a few basic approaches that many games use.

Many popular game systems use simple success/fail criteria. You roll dice, and if those dice are equal to or lower than a given number, you succeed. This is a good approach for several reasons, not least of which is the simplicity. From the target number, it's usually easy for a player to assess their probability of success, which in turn may affect their decision to perform the action in the first place. This last point is an important one, because roleplayers are usually a cautious bunch on the whole. If they don't know what the chances are of success *before* they make a roll, they usually won't make it!

Instant decisions?

A lot of early and second-generation game systems experimented with charts, rather than straight probability numbers, to measure success or failure. The *Marvel Super Heroes* and *Doctor Who* roleplaying games are good examples of these. However well-designed these charts were though, they always seemed to fall down on the same basic problem, namely that it was a fraction harder, or at least more fiddly, for the player to work out his or her chance of success beforehand, which in turn slowed down the decision-making process. By comparison, for even vaguely numerate people, probability numbers have the advantage of instant comprehension.

Third-generation system designs, such as *Star Wars* and *Shadowrun*, use radically different methods for task resolution. They are based on rolling numbers of dice to beat a referee-set difficulty level. Though not as instantly comprehensible as a probability number, these systems are nevertheless easy to use and fun. Of the two games mentioned, *Star Wars* is probably the weaker system, if only because the difficulty numbers are quite large, and it can be a pain rolling and counting up ten or more dice to beat scores in the tens or twenties. (Often this fails the Oliver Test – see part one) By comparison, *Shadowrun* uses only single-digit difficulty numbers, with the quality of success being determined by the number of dice that rolled above the target figure.

Conflict between opponents using the same or different attributes can be handled in many ways. Some games, such as *Runequest*, have a simple chart which cross-references the attributes to determine probabilities of success. Others, like *Pendragon*, rely on 'opposed rolls' – both players rolling against their probability numbers, with the higher rolled success being the winner. Mechanics like these suggest the concept of the 'quality of success' – the idea that a system doesn't just measure success or failure, but it also measures how good the success or failure is.

The notion of qualitative success has been around in roleplaying games since the beginning. Even the earliest systems had mechanics for 'critical hits' in combat, where an especially high or low roll could do extra damage to an opponent. Since then, systems for measuring qualitative success have become ever more sophisticated. Chart-based games such as *Marvel Super Heroes* and *James Bond* have instant advantages over probability number-based systems, because the differing degrees of success can be worked out in fine detail by the designer and laid out graphically. But third-generation systems such as *Shadowrun* go one better by eschewing charts completely while incorporating success quality into their core rules.

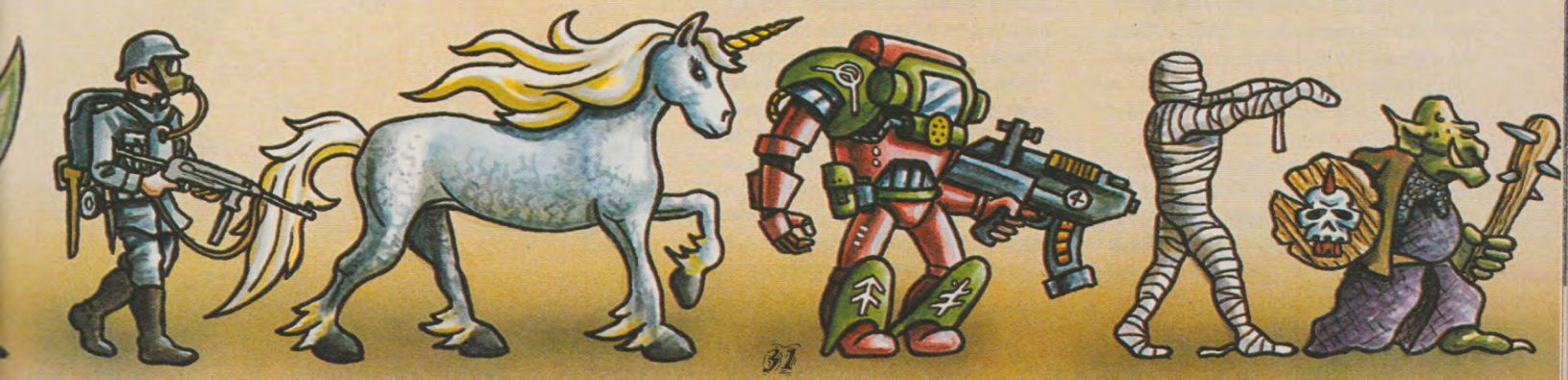
The advantage of these systems is obvious. It adds some subtle shading to the play of the game. Not only is simple success important, but how well a player does may give them an edge, particularly in a conflict situation. A sword fight between two masters could turn, not on a success/fail criteria, but on whoever rolls consistently better results.

"As for game mechanics, there are probably a million ways to determine success or failure."

An important thing to remember when creating a system is that the actual roll of the dice is a tangible connection between the player and the game. Rolling dice (or bones, or pulling playing cards, or whatever) actually gives the player a sense of having *done* something, just as their character has.

Next month

In part four, I'll be entering the final phases in the quest to create the perfect roleplaying game for you. I'll be taking a look at how to flesh-out the rules so they hold together as a complete system, and examine how you should go about introducing your game to your players. So make sure you get your copy of **arcane** 9 when it hits the shelves on 12th July.



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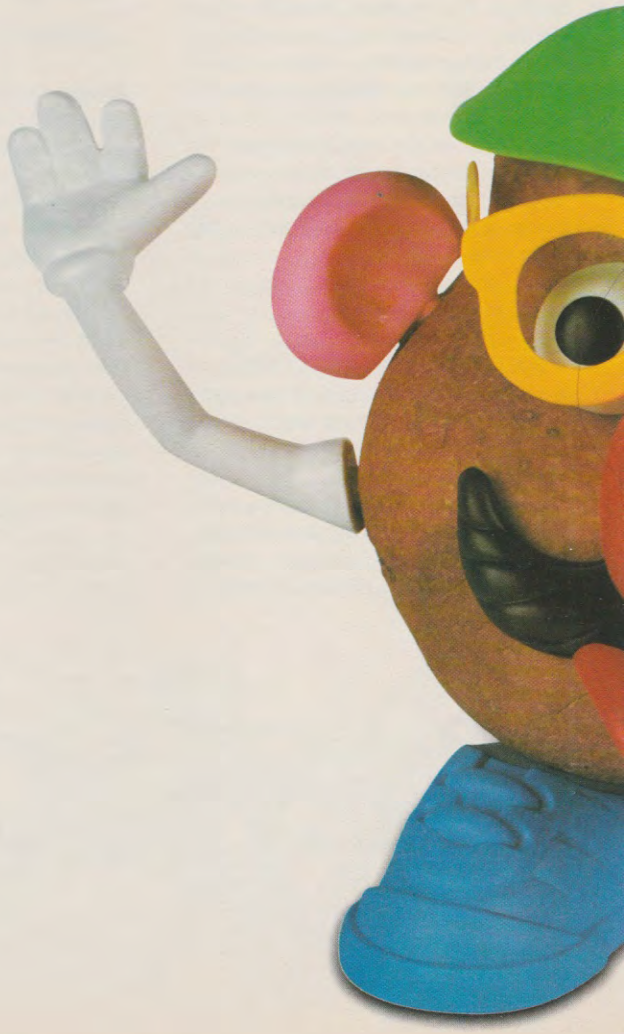
There's more to roleplaying t
So, asks ***Andy Butcher,*** *why*



Whether they be questing knights, cynical FBI agents, high-tech starship traders, or any of the countless other possibilities offered by the impressive range of games, settings and genres currently available, the players' characters are, and always have been, the central focus of any roleplaying game.

The way we perceive these characters, though, has changed quite a lot since the days of mindless dungeon-bashing, when their most important aspects were how many hit points the fighter had or which spells the wizard could memorise. As the hobby has developed, player characters have become more than a simple collection of numbers on a sheet of paper, and more and more emphasis has been placed on their personalities, motivations and goals.

"Unfortunately, as far as player characters are concerned, too much detail is a lot like too much beer..."

Now this is no bad thing. After all, the whole idea of roleplaying is to take on the part of someone else. Concentrating more on who this person *is,* rather than just what they *do,* has allowed far more variety in the style of games available, which in turn has offered us more choice, different challenges and more fun.

However, this shift in emphasis hasn't occurred without causing some problems. The importance that many games (and a lot of gamers) place on this aspect of gaming can easily make you feel that it's not enough simply to enjoy playing anymore – you want to be seen as a 'good' roleplayer as well. In an effort to create more convincing, realistic or interesting characters, it's easy to fall into the trap of making your characters more and more complex. Some players write pages of background and history, others spend hours agonising over their character's motivations and goals, relationships with their family, feelings about important issues, and a whole host of other considerations.

Unfortunately, as far as the player characters are concerned, too much detail is a lot like too much beer – it seems like a great idea at the time, but you nearly always end up regretting it later.

For a start, roleplaying can be quite a demanding pastime, especially for new groups or new players. Attempting to portray a highly detailed and complex character just makes things more difficult, if not impossible. Roleplaying games are meant to be challenging – it's a great part of what makes them so satisfying and enjoyable – but complex and detailed characters can often turn the challenges into struggles, and struggling is no fun at all, no matter how dedicated you are.

In addition, adventure and discovery are vital aspects of nearly all roleplaying games. Much of the fun for players and referees alike comes from not knowing quite what will happen next, and constantly being faced with new challenges and unique situations. Attempting to fully detail a character can seriously detract from this. If you try to work out how the character feels about and reacts to everything beforehand, you deny yourself much of the enjoyment that comes from having to make spur-of-the-moment decisions and plans – the very thing that makes many roleplaying sessions so memorable. If you take this to extremes you're simply reducing the character to a set of programmed responses and reactions, which somewhat defeats the whole point of roleplaying games.

On a similar note, overly detailed or complex characters can be very limiting for you, the other players and the referee. The more detail you put into the character to start with, the less freedom you and the referee have to introduce or develop new aspects of the character's personality and background during play. There's also a tendency, having put so much work into the character, for the player to attempt to stick rigidly to what he or she has decided. As we discussed in 'The Heart of the Matter' (**arcane** 4), this can be extremely disrupting to the whole game – players refusing to go along with the plans of the referee or group simply because it's not 'in character' is one of the most common reasons for games breaking down.

Many players take a lot of time and effort to create highly detailed and complex characters out of the mistaken belief that these characters are 'better' than simpler ones. They think it proves they are 'good' roleplayers, or that roleplaying a simple character is monotonous and boring. None of this is true.

Just because a character doesn't have pages of background history and a dozen fascinating personality traits doesn't mean

NG IN RIGHT CTION

building a complex character. keep your alter egos simple?

that it's automatically one-dimensional, stereotypical, or less impressive and fun to play. In nearly all roleplaying games, the players' characters are the heroes of the story. If you stop and think about many of the most popular fictional characters, you begin to realise that many of them are, at their cores, extremely simple. Batman, King Arthur, just about every major character in the ever-popular *Star Wars* films, and many other successful heroes and villains are all defined by only a few key traits and motivations. 'Break the Mould', in **arcane** 2, looked at how it's their very simplicity that gives these characters much of their power and appeal.

The idea that playing a complex and highly detailed character, often with traits very different to those you possess, somehow makes you a 'better' roleplayer is also fatally flawed. For a start it's almost impossible to do effectively. Even the most talented, highly regarded actors and actresses – people such as De Niro, Brando, Helen Miren and Meryl Streep – are only capable of playing a limited number of roles, and always bring a great deal of themselves to the characters they portray. The reason that these people are regarded as great actors is because they play their parts convincingly, not because those parts are complex. This is what you should concentrate on – roleplaying a more simple character convincingly is far more effective (and far more fun) than failing miserably to roleplay a complicated one.

Likewise, just because a character is simple doesn't mean that he or she is not interesting. How the player characters deal with the situations they find themselves in, the other characters they encounter and each other is what's most important in a roleplaying game. A character with just a couple of strong personality traits can be the source of a lot more drama, conflict and enjoyment than one laden with excess detail, especially in situations which present the character with tough decisions or moral dilemmas. The betrayal of King Arthur by the two people that he loved more than anyone else is no less fascinating and powerful because he's not a particularly complex character. Neither is the internal conflict between Batman's quest for revenge against criminals and his strong moral code of ethics, despite the fact that these are the only essential aspects of his nature – quite the opposite, in fact.

So try to keep your characters simple. Don't spend hours agonising over every single aspect of their personality, just concentrate on the basics. After deciding what kind of character you want to play, ask yourself why this person is doing what they're doing, and what they're like. Think of one or two motivations and a basic character, including no more than three noticeable personality traits. Sum up the character's background and history in no more than five sentences, then leave it at that. Bear in mind that what the character did before the game starts is nowhere near as important as what they do once play begins. Over the course of even a relatively short campaign your character will grow and develop – all you need to do is set some basic groundwork.

Some systems make this approach easier than others, and that's where the referee can help. Perhaps the worst offenders are points-based systems such as *GURPS,* which can actively encourage players to take a lot of strong personality and background traits. As a referee, you should keep a careful eye on what your players are choosing, and feel free to impose a limit on the number of disadvantages a character can take. As a player, think very carefully about what you pick, and try to tie them in with the general concept of the character.

On the other hand, systems such as *Star Wars* and *Shadowrun,* which use character templates, are often a good thing, encouraging players to concentrate on the basics. The 'nature' and 'demeanour' system used in White Wolf's storyteller games is also a good starting point – you think of a one-word description for your character's true goals and motivations, and another for how the character acts on the surface. Just the simple interactions between these two aspects of a character's personality can provide more than enough potential for some very interesting play.

"Roleplaying a simple character convincingly is far more effective than failing to roleplay a complicated one."

When it really comes down to it, though, 'good' roleplaying is when you, the other players and the referee all have a good time and enjoy yourselves. More often than not, complicated characters just get in the way of that.

GL
PIL

We've all been there. You phone your gaming group and a couple of them can't make it: "I've got band practice tonight," or, "My wife's ill – gotta stay in and look after her, you know how it is." Indeed we do. As we get older, organising a weekly gaming session with our friends becomes increasingly difficult, but that shouldn't mean we're doomed to staying in every single night watching the box instead. If you want to carry on your gaming hobby 'after hours', there are many different ways you can do it. There are computer roleplaying games, there are games that use the Internet, and then there are play-by-mail systems.

Play-by-mail has been around for a long, long time – almost as long as the roleplaying hobby itself. It's hugely popular, and for good reason: it enables us to play the games we want to play, when we want to.

Just what is play-by-mail?

The basic idea is fairly simple. Instead of meeting a small group of friends and playing together over a table, you participate in a much larger game by posting your orders to a professional referee. You have the opportunity to play types of games that your gaming group may not ordinarily be interested in. Your imagination really is the limit here, because several companies actually cater for players who wish to choose their own genre, background, character and aims (subject to obvious censorship laws, of course). On the other hand, quite mainstream and well-known games are available in play-by-mail format – *Middle Earth* and *Illuminati* are just two such examples. The range of games (we look at just 20 over the following four pages) is immense – whatever your taste, there's undoubtedly a play-by-mail system out there for you.

But isn't play-by-mail expensive?

Some people may think so, but PBM is actually a relatively cheap form of entertainment. Each turn gives you a lot to muse over and most players simply relish the hours they spend formulating their next set of orders. Above and beyond this is the diplomacy and roleplaying that forms such an important part of postal gaming. Okay, so you may end up spending a couple of quid a week, or every ten days, but that's no more that the price of a pint of lager, and in my experience roleplayers think nothing of spending somewhat more than that on liquid refreshment each week!

Long distance relationships

In traditional table-top game systems you know all of your fellow players personally – along with their game character comes the baggage of their real life persona. Sure, they might be great people, but the characters they are playing will never be more than just that – characters. The worlds of play-by-mail are often enormous, containing (possibly) thousands of other players, and if you are going to survive in such an environment for more than five minutes, you're going to have to make friends. It's here that PBMs become really fun. You don't know the people you are going to be in contact with, in fact you'll probably never meet them; to you, these people only ever exist as the character they are playing. Given these circumstances, roleplaying becomes far more real than in any other gaming format. For example, if you are in contact with the leader of a small party of overweight dwarves, that's exactly what he will be. If such a contact promises to help you in a quest for some long lost treasure, it will not be a real life friend that's going to aid you, but a real little, fat, dwarf, beard and all, that you happened to meet in one of the many wonderful worlds of play-by-mail.

These games offer unique opportunities which you'll never encounter when sat around the gaming table. Of course, the opposite is also true, but if you never play a PBM game, you're never going to find out just how much fun it can be. So, **arcane** readers, we've got together with a bunch of PBM companies and wangled you some deals. There are free turns in all of the games we look at in this feature, so there's no excuse – enrich the Royal Mail by 25 pence and give play-by-mail a shot. We're sure you won't regret it.

Let The Play Begin!

When you've read the next four pages you'll no doubt want to pursue some of the special offers. Many of the offers featured are exclusive to arcane readers, so it is important that you mention arcane in all correspondence.

OBAL

LAGE

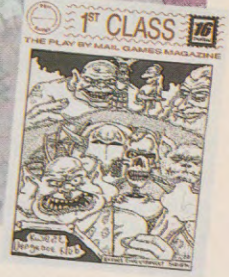
Roleplaying needn't be all about you and your mates crowding round a tiny table once a week. With play-by-mail you can play by yourself, and with thousands of other gamers at once. Sounds complicated? Well it needn't be, as ***Mathew Green*** *explains...*

ESSENTIAL!

You need these addresses, so make a note of each and every one if you want to take advantage of our 20 free games offer!

CRASWORLD	*FREEPOST, 4 Cresent Avenue, Thorton Cleveleys, Lancs. FY5 3JE*
K.J.C. GAMES	*FREEPOST, Thorton Cleveleys, Lancs. FY5 3BR*
MADHOUSE	*13 Marchmont Green, Hemel Hempstead, Herts. HP2 5BB*
PHILDEE ENTERPRISES	*PO Box 7, Rhayader, Powys, Wales LD6 5DW*
SLOTH ENTERPRISES	*FREEPOST, Southampton SO9 1BH*
SPELLBINDER GAMES	*76 Doncaster Road, Wath-Upon-Dearne, Rotherham, South Yorks. S63 7AF*
TIMEPATTERNS	*14 The Hollows, Exmouth, Devon EX8 1QT*
TIMEWRYM	*37 Wendover Court, Western Avenue, North Acton, London W13 0TG*

Note. Although you may apply for as many free offers as you wish, please do not select more than two from KJC Games, who will also send all applying **arcane** readers a free complementary copy of *1st Class* PBM magazine. **Also, free copies of the 16-page *Games without Frontiers*, an introduction to postal gaming, are available from Timewrym on request.**



BEYOND THE STELLAR EMPIRE

Free: ***Training manual and one turn, 80-page rule book provided on turn 2.*** *Deadlines:* ***7 or 14 days. Future turns cost £2.50 - £4.00. Available from KJC Games.***

At the frontier, several distant 'Peripheries' have been discovered. The race is on to explore, exploit and conquer them. You begin this game with just a single starship with which to make a name for yourself on the bold new frontier. From humanitarian xeno anthropologist to overly enthusiastic megalomaniac, the different roles you may take are endless. Physics and astronomy degree graduates form part of the gamesmaster staff for added realism. But don't worry, you don't need to be a genius to play this game, you just need an insatiable desire to 'live' in an awfully big universe where anything can happen (and most probably will). An unlimited number of players may join this open-ended game; and remember, if you do make a major impact you will be truly demonstrating the supreme quality of your gaming and roleplaying skills.

COSMIC CRUSADERS

Free: ***Rules plus two turns.*** *Deadlines:* ***every 10 days. Future turns cost £2.00. Available from Madhouse.***

Cosmic Crusaders borrows heavily from the *Aliens* atmosphere in this science-fiction tactical level game of combat aboard an abandoned alien spacecraft of unknown origin. Each player controls five marines, whose task is to take control of the craft on behalf of their corporation. Don't think it's easy, though – other players' marine units, alien lifeforms, creatures and defence systems will all prove to be an extremely taxing experience for your rather limited resources. More advanced weaponry and armour can be found aboard, and robots can also be acquired with skilled play.

FEUDAL LORDS

Free: ***Rules and start-up turn.*** *Deadlines:* ***14 days. Future turns cost £1.50 - £1.75. Available from Sloth Enterprises.***

King Arthur is dead and buried, and the barons of England and Wales lay claim to the throne. In *Feudal Lords* you are one of these men (or women) competing with up to 14 other people for the right to rule the kingdom. First you must win the loyalty of your people, then build up your fief's economy, train your knights, send your champion on quests of valour and your fleet on missions of trade. Eventually, you will be ready for the wars ahead. In these, your ultimate aim is to win the fealty of the other barons. Only time and destiny will decide who will be the one to draw the sword from the stone and earn the prestigious right to be crowned King of England. This is a reasonably snappy roleplaying game, lasting for just 10 to 25 turns.

You Want Even More?

We've detailed just eight PBM companies in this feature (including the UK's largest, KJC Games), but there are well over 100 others offering between 250 and 300 different postal games across the country. As luck would have it, there is a way of finding out more about them, and PBM in general. Stick a request in the post, mentioning arcane, to: Flagship, PO Box 39, Exeter, Devon EX8 1VR, and Flagship will send you a copy of its *Flagship* PBM magazine (worth £3) completely free of charge.

And if even that's not enough, TimePatterns has got copies of *The Complete Guide to Postal Gaming*, a 192-page book, which it's making available to arcane readers for £5 – that's half the normal price. Write to: TimePatterns, 14 The Hollows, Exmouth, Devon EX8 1QT for details on how you can place an order.

Galaxy

Free: ***Rules and two turns.*** *Deadlines:* ***10 to 12 days. Future turns cost £1.70. Available from Spellbinder Games.***

A simple introduction to the sci-fi genre, *Galaxy* is dubbed an 'Explore, Expand, Conquer' game. Each player starts with a single world, and from there must explore and conquer all. Players are free to design starships around simple parameters, which is a great feature. Good for novices and those who have not yet explored sci-fi gaming.

Golden Realms II

Free: ***Rules and two turns.*** *Deadlines:* ***10 to 12 days. Future turns cost £1.60. Available from Spellbinder Games.***

A classic, simple fantasy wargame, ideal for the beginner. You play one of 24 kings, holding an arcane crystal Orb which provides you with magical powers. With this power come spells to aid your armies of valkyries, orcs, knights, dragons and other combatants. Your Orb grows in power and changes hue with each enemy that falls to you – once golden, no one can stop you!

Hand of the Demon

Free: ***Rules and two turns.*** *Deadlines:* ***10 to 12 days. Future turns cost £1.85. Available from Spellbinder Games.***

You play one of 16 kingdoms in a world that lives in fear of the Demon Lord, Draum, knowing that whatever your own aims of conquest, Draum is too powerful for any nation to stand before. You must be wise enough to recognise those who can help you fight against the demon hordes. However, only one man may be High King, so you must use other empires for your own ends before disposing of them.

Heroic Fantasy

Free: ***Rules and two turns.*** *Deadlines:* ***7, 10 or 14 days. Future turns cost £1.50 - £1.75. Available from Sloth Enterprises.***

Interactive dungeon-delving and high adventure. You hand-pick your own party of adventurers, choosing their race, class and personality, and send them down into the unknown dangers that lurk in the dungeon of the mad wizard, Buffobane. *Heroic Fantasy* offers many challenges: strange monsters, weird magic items, other players' and non-players' parties, fiendish trick traps. Each of your party members can move independently from the others it suits you, you can split them up. A good open-ended game for beginners.

Isle of Crowns II

Free: ***Rules and start-up turn.*** *Deadlines:* ***12 days. Future turns £1.95 or £30 all 20. Available from KJC Games.***

In this fantasy wargame, 20 players battle it out with the aim of becoming K Crowns. To do this, you must expand from your corner of the island, taking c of as much territory as possible. As you capture strongholds, you can build a containing different racial types. You can hire wizards and train dragons to f your ambitions. The game lasts for a fixed 20 turns.

It's a Crime

Free: ***Rules and two turns.*** *Deadlines:* ***12 days. Future turns £1.00 - £2.00. Available from KJC Games.***

You are the leader of a New York City-based gang. Your aim is to become the most notorious gang with the largest turf. You need to recruit punks, extort dollars and buy weapons. If you become a powerful gang, you get the chance to become a Mob Boss. Your family and loyal gangs then compete for control of illicit businesses across the city, aiming to be declared Godfather. Great stuff.

Kingdom

Free: ***Rules and two turns. No deadlines, send turns as often/seldom as you w Future turns £1.75. Available from Sloth Enterprises.***

Kingdom has all the elements of a classic fantasy wargame – magic, intrigue battle. Up to 200 players inhabit the game world, aiming to bring back to kingdom the wonders of an age long since gone. This game doesn't end wh player 'wins', rather, any player that reaches the required 'victory level' is rem from the game and given £50 credit in any other game from Sloth.

Kings and Things

Free: ***Rules.*** *Deadlines:* ***14 days. Turns £2.25 - £2.75. Available from Sloth Enterprises.***

Kings and Things places you as a minor noble, in a world where killer penguins may be armed with crossbows, and the terrain is as reliable as a Met Office forecast. You explore the lands of Kadab, muster armies of creatures, plunder hidden wealth and recruit heroes. Extensive rules for spying, sorcery and trade will be needed to construct a Citadel and to become a contender for the throne.

Kings of Zanthia

Free: ***Rules and two turns.*** *Deadlines:* ***Contact Phildee. Future turns £2.50. Available from Phildee Enterprises.***

This is a game of discovery and conquest. 42 players compete ferociously dominance in the world of Zanthia. Military power is an obvious aid in this stru but economic strength is used to measure the true power of your position different fantasy races may be mustered to complement your arsenal of m

spells and summoned creatures. You should learn to invest your wealth wisely, and improve your garrisons and training academies at the expense of falling behind in market growth.

Lizards

Free: Rules and two turns. Deadlines: 10 days. Future turns £2.00. Available from Madhouse.

A fantasy wargame for 16 players, each controlling an ever-expanding clan of ferocious reptiles. The game features many different types of lizards each with their own abilities and skills. (It's quite difficult deciding which race of lizards you want to play at the start of the game.) A strange magic system features chanting, dancing and other lizardly shamanic activities. An entertaining game which comes with a helpful beginners' guidesheet.

Midhir

Free: Rules and one turn. Deadlines: 21 or 42 days (this slower turnaround helps keep costs down). Future turns £3.00. Available from Timewyrm.

A complex open-ended fantasy game. Players control small nations at the start of the game and may, by means of war, diplomacy or economic power, expand to become a great empire. Through your selection of characters and armies, you may go adventuring, cast spells, wage war, even invent and spread your own religion. Set your own goals while interacting with 39 or more other players in each game.

Monster Island

Free: Rules and first printout. Future turns £2.00. Available from KJC Games.

Each player takes on the role of a monster who's been washed ashore on the western coast of a vast island. You set off in search of knowledge, adventure and food. As many as 15,000 other players make for interesting nature trails, and the wildlife includes some deady monsters. One-way travel only, offer doesn't include food, lodging or insurance. Open-ended with no deadlines.

Necromancer

Free: Rules and two turns. Deadlines: 10 days. Future turns £2.00. Available from Madhouse.

Based in a wasted world, each player takes the role of a necromancer. Your aim is to be the last sentient being, achievable only by annihilating all the others. Control zombies, skeletons, vampiric lieutenants, strange haunting Reapers and other undead minions. A combination of strategy, magical reconnaissance, research and diplomacy is required if your evilness is to prevail.

Crasimoff's Quest World

Free: Quest rules, Crasimoff's World Supplement and three turns! Future turns £1.95. Available from Crasiworld.

This fantasy roleplaying game, which is set in a fantastically detailed game world, is a version of the original *Quest*, licensed from KJC Games. Although the game systems are essentially the same, each has a different game background. Legends, mysteries and creatures all differ, providing an alternative atmosphere for your adventures. Addicts will play this game in addition to *Quest*. You get a free newsletter with every turn result. Open-ended with no deadlines.

Quest

Free: Rules and three turns. Deadlines: 7, 10 or 14 days. Future turns £1.80. Available from KJC Games.

A fantasy game in which each player creates a party of adventurers for the world of Kharne. *Quest* allows players to set their own goals, with a mixture of discovery, combat, magic and religion offering many possibilities. 999 other players inhabit the game world. An exciting, open-ended game.

Starglobe Plus

Free: Rules and one turn. Future turns £2.70. Available from TimePatterns.

At the start of the game you captain your own starship, charged with setting up a watch station at the edge of the galaxy. You are free to explore, set up colonies, trade or fight with other players and try to deal with aliens. *Starglobe* offers great roleplaying possibilities and the referee is well known for producing humorous turn results. Open-ended with no deadlines. Send turns when you feel like it.

Vampire!

Free: Rules and two turns. Deadlines: flexible. Future turns £2.50. Available from Phildee Enterprises.

The setting is London, the year is 1996, and nobody really knows what lurks hidden in the sinister shadows of darkness. All player characters start off as newly-created vampires. The emphasis is on delving into the dark existence of the vampire and learning how to grow stronger. Great roleplaying possibilities. Note: this game bears little similarity to the White Wolf game *(Vampire the Masquerade)*.

Say What?

Bash that PBM jargon with our quick and dirty guide to those techy terms.

START-UP: When you first receive a new PBM game you are normally required to make a number of choices which determine the nature of your character or starting position. Essentially this is similar to 'rolling a character', and must be completed before you are able to send off your first turn.

TURN: A series of forms that are filled in by the player and then posted to the company that is moderating your game. The turn is used to detail the activity you wish your 'position' to undertake within the game setting.

TURN RESULT: The results of your turn are sent back to you, including updated map information, new possessions listings, and (if you ordered your position to do a little spying) news of what some of the other positions in the game are doing. Fresh forms are also included for your next turn.

POSITION: What you control and/or own within a game world. A position may be just a single character, but can extend to cover an entire empire. Each turn result will include a fresh printout of your position, which can be dozens of pages in length on occasion.

DEADLINES: The majority of the games detailed in this feature are 'deadline games'. The deadline tells you how often you need to send in a turn to continue playing. Typically, a deadline falls every ten days or every fortnight.

OPEN-ENDED: An open-ended game will in theory last forever. Worlds within such games are usually so vast that a single player would never be able to fully conquer all. Games that are not open-ended normally end after perhaps 6 to 24 months, when one player or alliance has elevated themselves to a position of total dominance.

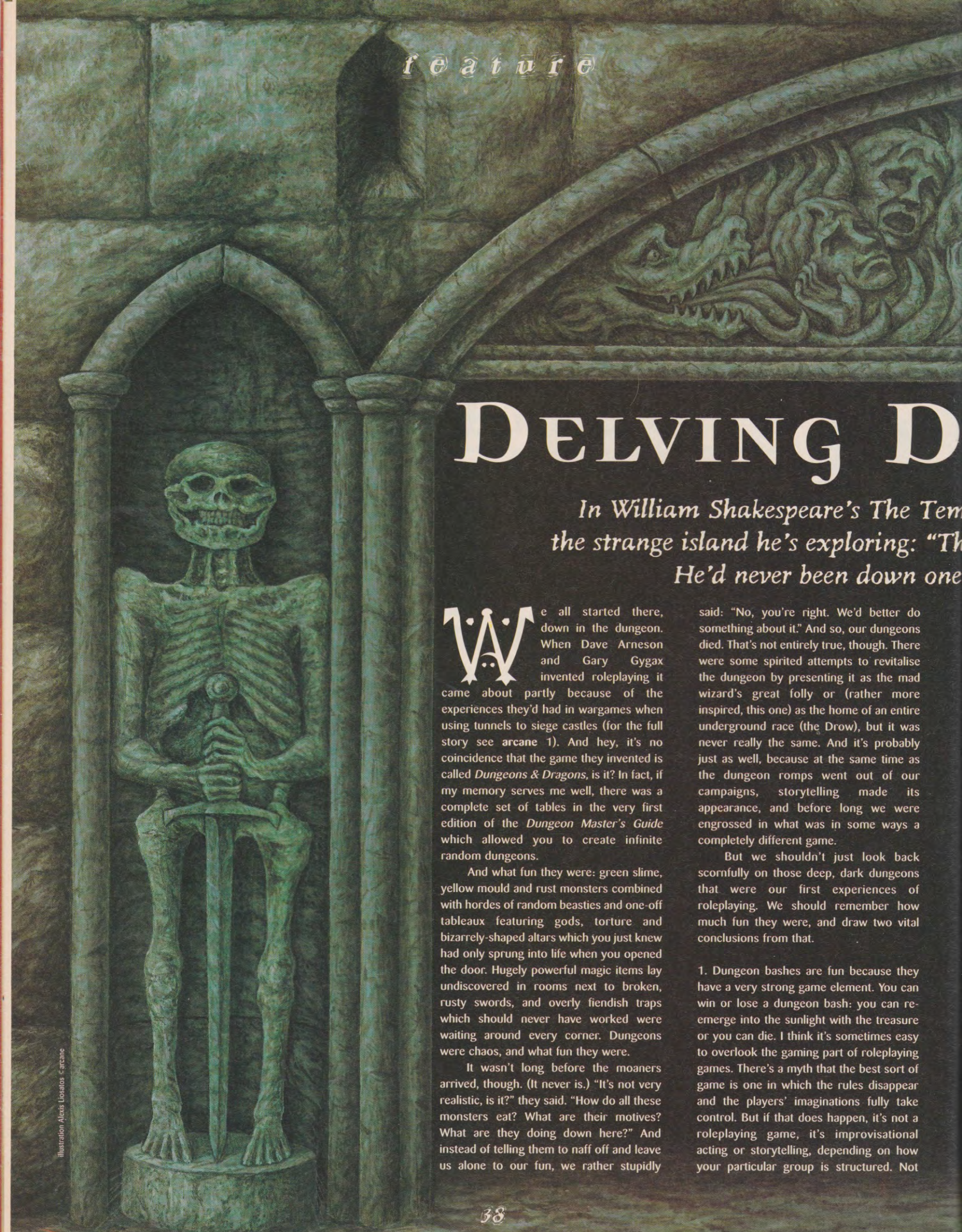


illustration Alexis Liosatos ©arcane

Delving D

In William Shakespeare's The Tem
the strange island he's exploring: "Th
He'd never been down one

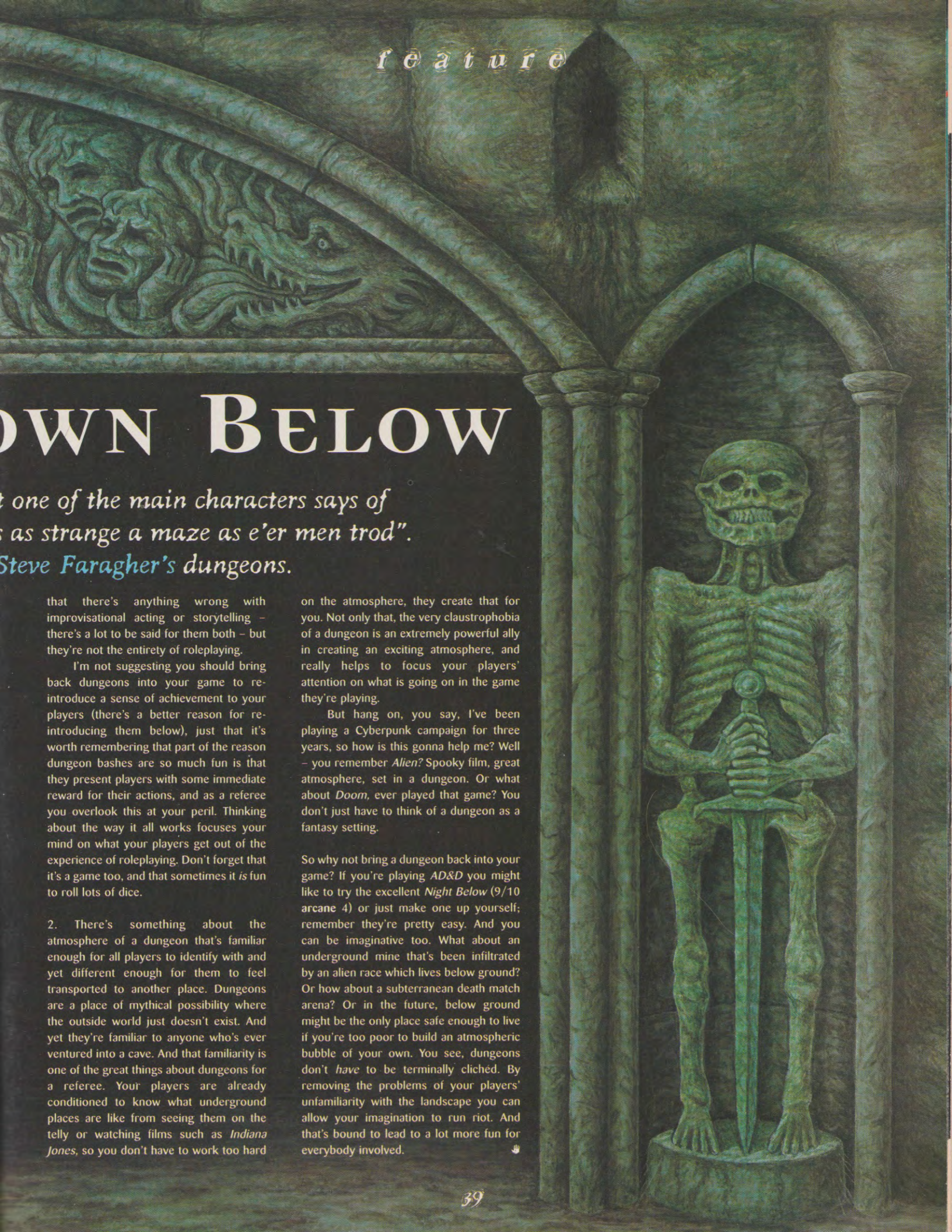
We all started there, down in the dungeon. When Dave Arneson and Gary Gygax invented roleplaying it came about partly because of the experiences they'd had in wargames when using tunnels to siege castles (for the full story see **arcane** 1). And hey, it's no coincidence that the game they invented is called *Dungeons & Dragons*, is it? In fact, if my memory serves me well, there was a complete set of tables in the very first edition of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* which allowed you to create infinite random dungeons.

And what fun they were: green slime, yellow mould and rust monsters combined with hordes of random beasties and one-off tableaux featuring gods, torture and bizarrely-shaped altars which you just knew had only sprung into life when you opened the door. Hugely powerful magic items lay undiscovered in rooms next to broken, rusty swords, and overly fiendish traps which should never have worked were waiting around every corner. Dungeons were chaos, and what fun they were.

It wasn't long before the moaners arrived, though. (It never is.) "It's not very realistic, is it?" they said. "How do all these monsters eat? What are their motives? What are they doing down here?" And instead of telling them to naff off and leave us alone to our fun, we rather stupidly said: "No, you're right. We'd better do something about it." And so, our dungeons died. That's not entirely true, though. There were some spirited attempts to revitalise the dungeon by presenting it as the mad wizard's great folly or (rather more inspired, this one) as the home of an entire underground race (the Drow), but it was never really the same. And it's probably just as well, because at the same time as the dungeon romps went out of our campaigns, storytelling made its appearance, and before long we were engrossed in what was in some ways a completely different game.

But we shouldn't just look back scornfully on those deep, dark dungeons that were our first experiences of roleplaying. We should remember how much fun they were, and draw two vital conclusions from that.

1. Dungeon bashes are fun because they have a very strong game element. You can win or lose a dungeon bash: you can re-emerge into the sunlight with the treasure or you can die. I think it's sometimes easy to overlook the gaming part of roleplaying games. There's a myth that the best sort of game is one in which the rules disappear and the players' imaginations fully take control. But if that does happen, it's not a roleplaying game, it's improvisational acting or storytelling, depending on how your particular group is structured. Not



own Below

t one of the main characters says of
s as strange a maze as e'er men trod".
Steve Faragher's dungeons.

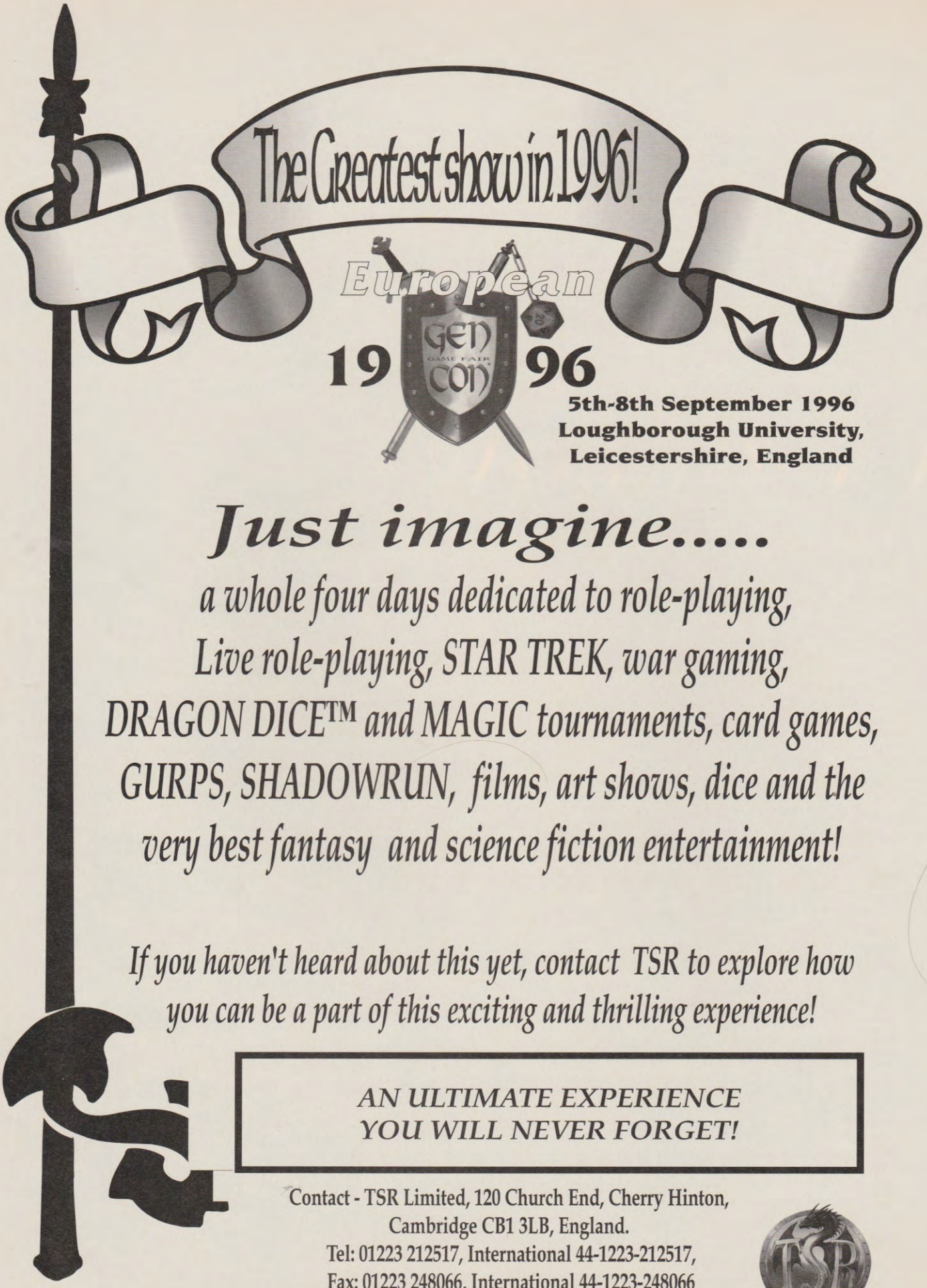
that there's anything wrong with improvisational acting or storytelling – there's a lot to be said for them both – but they're not the entirety of roleplaying.

I'm not suggesting you should bring back dungeons into your game to re-introduce a sense of achievement to your players (there's a better reason for re-introducing them below), just that it's worth remembering that part of the reason dungeon bashes are so much fun is that they present players with some immediate reward for their actions, and as a referee you overlook this at your peril. Thinking about the way it all works focuses your mind on what your players get out of the experience of roleplaying. Don't forget that it's a game too, and that sometimes it *is* fun to roll lots of dice.

2. There's something about the atmosphere of a dungeon that's familiar enough for all players to identify with and yet different enough for them to feel transported to another place. Dungeons are a place of mythical possibility where the outside world just doesn't exist. And yet they're familiar to anyone who's ever ventured into a cave. And that familiarity is one of the great things about dungeons for a referee. Your players are already conditioned to know what underground places are like from seeing them on the telly or watching films such as *Indiana Jones*, so you don't have to work too hard on the atmosphere, they create that for you. Not only that, the very claustrophobia of a dungeon is an extremely powerful ally in creating an exciting atmosphere, and really helps to focus your players' attention on what is going on in the game they're playing.

But hang on, you say, I've been playing a Cyberpunk campaign for three years, so how is this gonna help me? Well – you remember *Alien?* Spooky film, great atmosphere, set in a dungeon. Or what about *Doom*, ever played that game? You don't just have to think of a dungeon as a fantasy setting.

So why not bring a dungeon back into your game? If you're playing *AD&D* you might like to try the excellent *Night Below* (9/10 **arcane** 4) or just make one up yourself; remember they're pretty easy. And you can be imaginative too. What about an underground mine that's been infiltrated by an alien race which lives below ground? Or how about a subterranean death match arena? Or in the future, below ground might be the only place safe enough to live if you're too poor to build an atmospheric bubble of your own. You see, dungeons don't *have* to be terminally clichéd. By removing the problems of your players' unfamiliarity with the landscape you can allow your imagination to run riot. And that's bound to lead to a lot more fun for everybody involved.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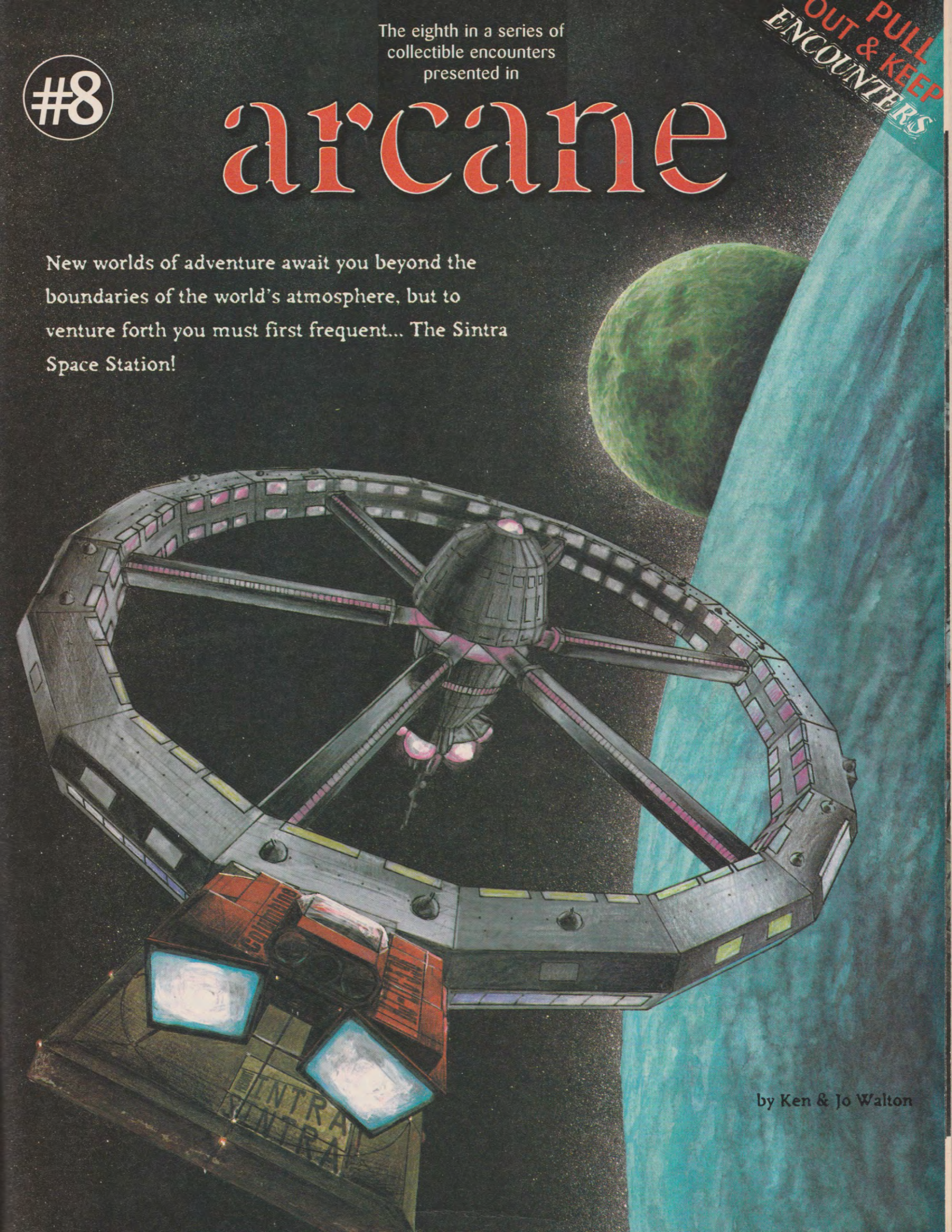
PULL OUT & KEEP ENCOUNTERS

#8

The eighth in a series of collectible encounters presented in

arcane

New worlds of adventure await you beyond the boundaries of the world's atmosphere, but to venture forth you must first frequent... The Sintra Space Station!



by Ken & Jo Walton

Once again **arcane** *is proud to present another detailed 11-page encounter, this month for use with any sci-fi system.*

Sintra Station

Station gravity took hold and suddenly 'down' felt different. Morgan O'Brien reoriented himself without difficulty.

"A perfect docking, Columbine. Welcome to Sintra station."

"Thank you, dockmaster."

"Customs and immigration officials will be waiting at your lock. I hope you enjoy your time on Sintra." The dockmaster's voice over the com sounded friendly, but Morgan was nervous. Of course it was a perfect dock. He'd been docking at stations for years. He was a good pilot, with an unimpeachable record. He wished his records for other things were as good. He checked the papers again as he walked to the lock. Sintra was a new station for him, and a chance to start fresh. Here he hoped to hire a crew and start a legitimate trading operation, in whatever space the big corporations left open to independents. It wasn't always easy – he knew that.

He stepped out of the lock, trying to look more confident than he felt. He immediately smelt the familiar scents of a big space station – machine oil and metal. He heard the clanking and clattering of canisters being unloaded from the next ship along the dock, the whirr of a gantry and away beyond that the unmistakable sound of people laughing and talking. There must be a newly-arrived transport full of people waiting to descend into the main wheel.

Then the airlock cycled and Morgan stepped outside, grinning confidently and offering his papers to the waiting officials. The dock looked like every other station dock he'd ever seen. But he looked about eagerly in any case. It was bustling with more people and aliens than he'd seen for a long time. But it didn't bother him. He was the owner/operator of his own spaceship, he was free on a new space station and he was 15 years old. Who knew what adventures might lie ahead?

Illustrations ©Simon Gurr & arcane

The System

You're bound to notice that, even though we present character descriptions for the people that populate Sintra Space Station, we don't provide you with any stats. That's a deliberate decision – you're supposed to be able to use this encounter with pretty well any science fiction RPG, and to provide stats for all of them would take up way too much space. That shouldn't be a problem for you – just make up the stats for these characters yourself, using the descriptions as a starting point. Same goes for other 'system' details – make them up to fit your campaign.

The Sintra space station is suitable for any space campaign. A section of the docks and the station offices are shown. A party with a spaceship could come here for any reason and find

adventures. Sintra is also a good place to start a campaign – a group could get together here and begin an adventure. It could then be used as a home base as the group keeps returning to Sintra between adventures. Sintra's internal politics and economics can then assume some importance.

The Docks

Everyone reaches Sintra by spaceship – either a shuttle up from the surface of the planet or an interstellar ship. In either case the ship docks with the main docking station and then gains access to the main wheel of the station via the central elevator system (which leads into the arrivals lounge). The docks are steel and metal. They are always busy and bustling with humans and aliens on foot and in small transports, which keep within the lines painted on the floor. Gangs of stationer youths hang around. All airlocks are guarded. The docks are connected to the rest of the station via an elevator system, which leads into the reception and customs area.

The Main Station area

The Shops

There are many shops on the station, selling all manner of wares, from the mundane to strange, alien artifacts.

The Seventh Star

The Seventh Star is a bar of average quality. It's not terribly rough, but sometimes there are fights between the crews of different ships. It does not serve food, only alcohol in various strengths and soft drinks. If there is a fight, a sheet-metal canopy crashes down over the bar, protecting the bartender but threatening the fingers of customers. Most things are permitted in the bar, but gambling is forbidden, and anyone who begins gambling is asked to leave immediately. The bar is usually busy with people from various ships which have docked.

Facility

Next to The Seventh Star is a public facility – a bathroom which is free and open to anyone. It is periodically checked to make sure that indigents are not sleeping there. These facilities can be found frequently along the many corridors and thoroughfares of Sintra.

Tsong Li's General Store

On the corner near the reception lounge is a shop, Tsong Li's General Store. It buys and sells anything and everything. Purchases are made either by coming to the store in person or electronically. In either case the customer browses the stock on the screen, and then Mr. Li fetches the goods from the storage area. There are many staples of life which Tsong Li's does not stock, but there are also many esoteric items which can be purchased there. Mr. Li will be interested in buying unique items, but not any junk, though he will redirect people wishing to see such things. If desired, this shop can connect to Mr. Smith's Mysterious Emporium, see **arcane** 3 (turn to page 53 if you missed it).

The Offices

Most people who come to Sintra have reason to visit the offices at some time during their stay. They may want to arrange departure times with the dockmaster, or they may have to visit customs to find out the status of their goods. They may want work from the registry. They may even be summoned to appear in the board room to explain their actions to the council of the station.

Reception Area

Anyone entering the station must pass through reception, announcing themselves at the desk. This area is always guarded. New arrivals must make themselves known to the staff working on the desks before being shown through customs (they may be searched, especially if they look particularly shifty, and all weapons will be taken from them).

The Registry

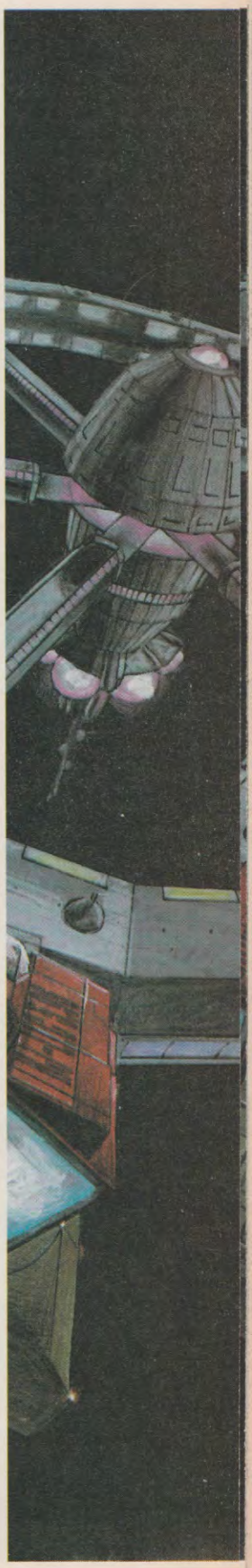
The registry is an office where new arrivals seeking work and those offering work can find each other. There is a large bank of computers offering access to the exchange. Unfortunately such access is not private from the registry, and sometimes people standing next to each other in physical location will outbid each other for a contract. Near to the registry is a sim room – here people seeking work can have their aptitudes tested, get or improve their licenses for piloting and other skills, and otherwise prove their ability to do the job they want. Any legitimate occupant of the station may register without fee, although there is a small certification fee for those wishing to gain or improve licenses. They may use the simulators to learn new skills, as long as they are not being used for other purposes.

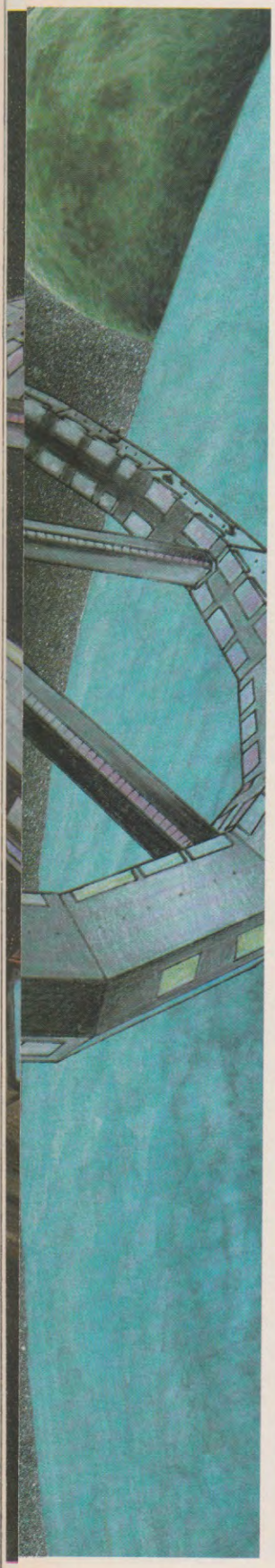
Dockmaster's Office

In the outer office people sit speaking directly by radio to incoming ships, assigning them lanes and docking sites at the station. Full radar scans of the system are available on the terminals here. The dockmaster or one of her assistants will always be present in the dockmaster's inner office, although much of the work is done on the ever-present computers. This is where all personal meetings are held and bribes paid.

Customs Office

The customs office sends a representative to every ship departing, making sure that tolls are paid on all trade done on Sintra and that no illegal items are imported on to the station. Illegal items are certain drugs, weapons and explosives. Sintran wine does not count as a drug and is completely legal on Sintra,





but those attempting to export wine may find that other stations have very different ideas about its status. The customs office is extremely hard on smugglers – the penalty is confiscation of the ship and ten years hard labour on the vineyards of the planet.

Security

This office is directly connected by computer to the rest of security elsewhere on Sintra, and help can arrive rapidly. Sintra has many marines and guards, as well as fast interception ships constantly on guard to protect the station. There is always a minimum of three armed guards in the office at any time. This is not where people will be taken for interrogation and imprisonment, unless they are very important. (For that use the Prison from **arcane** 7.) However, private interviews into security matters may be conducted here.

The Inhabitants

Sintra is inhabited by an assortment of people, most of whom have lived on stations all their life and are equally suspicious of ships and planets. It is a city in space, and like any city it has people working in all occupations. There are plenty of hairdressers, cleaners and bartenders, as well as space pilots, navigators and computer operators.

The Corporations

There are many big corporations in space, some owning and exploiting whole planets. Many of them also operate lines of big cargo carriers, creaming off the most profitable trade between stations. Most of the ships docked at Sintra belong to one or other of the corporations. They are sometimes rivals, but they all hate the independents who undercut them and prevent price fixing. Most of the corporations have rented office space on Sintra, and characters may be able to visit corp' officials if they require work.

Trading and the Exchange

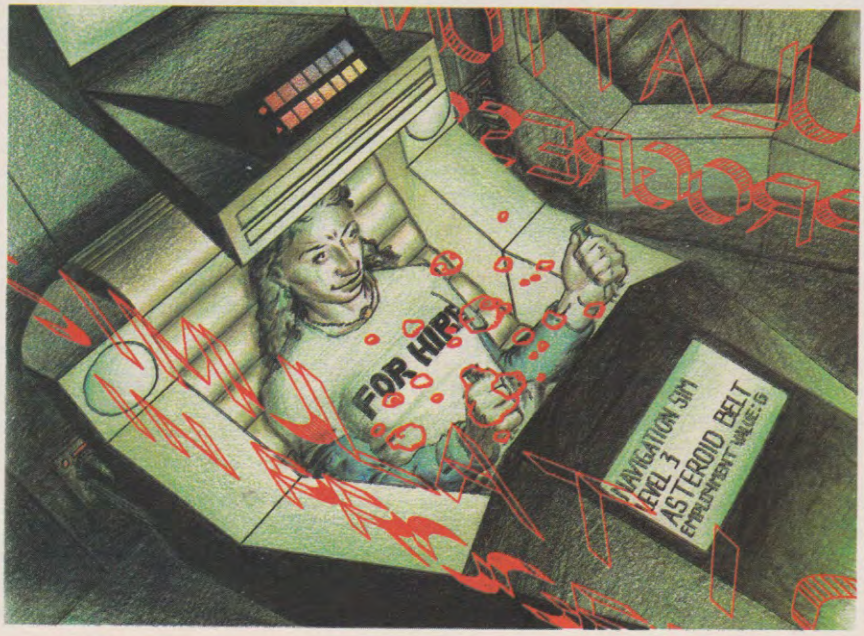
Sintra exports organics from the planet, as well as exotic and luxury food items. It imports technological items and metals. Ships can buy their own cargo at the exchange. They can also buy and sell for themselves if they have capital. If they do not, like Columbine, then they must bid to deliver cargo for an established company. This is safer than independent dealing, because the price paid will be fixed in advance. But there is not the same opportunity to make a profit.

There is a 'self sufficiency' movement on Sintra which thinks a metals reconstitution industry ought to be developed in-system to reduce reliance on this trade. A ship returning to Sintra to find that this had been instituted might find itself out of pocket. In general, trade between Sintra and other star systems is lucrative. As well as physical items, all carried in cans and stored in the holds of ships, there is also a trade in information, which is portable and includes mail between systems, copyright artworks and scientific information. This information is a commodity like any other, and the right to carry it to a particular system is bid for on the exchange.

The exchange is an electronic bulletin board where information about goods for sale and ships' destinations are discussed and bid for. People who cannot get to the exchange may access it at the dockmaster's office, the registry, or at various bars.

The Council

The council is an elected body of ten which governs Sintra. It meets in the board room and makes all the major decisions about running the station. At present the two political parties are deadlocked with five members each, and cannot agree on any changes of policy. They are elected for a term of five years and during that time they control Sintra completely. They meet for an hour every day and discuss issues. Elections are always a fraught time because policy on such things as expansion, trade and controlling the planet may change completely. Elections are democratic, but six of the ten have remained the same for the last 15 years.



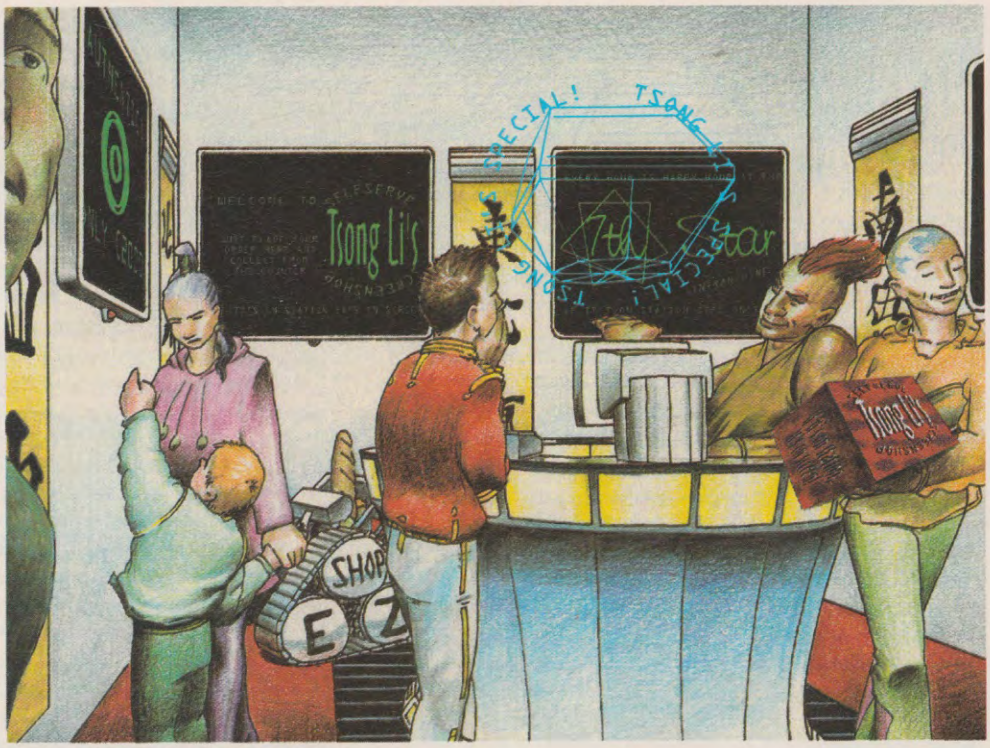
People

Morgan O'Brien

Morgan is 15, but his papers say that he is 19. He has just arrived on Sintra. He is extremely confident, charming and very attractive. Although he is not large he looks as if he can handle himself in a fight. He always has an answer in any circumstances, and can usually manage to talk his way out of trouble. He has a concealed past and is the captain of his own spaceship, the Columbine. He will lie about his planet of origin and is on Sintra seeking both cargo and a crew. Morgan has little capital for buying cargo, and he hopes to pick up a good deal. He is an excellent pilot, but finds it difficult to handle the ship alone for long periods.

Quote: "I can offer you an excellent opportunity to further your career –

and think of the fun we could have travelling between the stars!"



Farren Kendall

Farren is the dockmaster. She is small and dark, with a very loud voice and huge amounts of presence. She was born on Sintra, and all her loyalty is to the station. She is good at organising, and manages to keep everyone happy including the big corporations, the small independents and the local inhabitants. Of course if people clash, she feels the independents are the easiest to squeeze because they have the least power to affect Sintra. She will accept 'gifts' to facilitate whatever is wanted, but cannot be bribed into anything that harms the station, or what she perceives as her long-term interests.

Quote: "Thank you very much, sir, that will ease you up the list of departures. Another 50? Is there any particular reason you are in such a hurry to leave our beautiful station, sir?"

Oliver Yon

Oliver is the chief customs officer. He is tall and inscrutable looking, with a thin moustache. He is 60 years old. He emigrated to Sintra as a child from another station and has never been down on a planet. He is suspicious of independents and suspects them of smuggling and piracy. He is incorruptible and tries to encourage a culture of refusing bribes among all customs officials. This works fairly well, but there are some failures. He is always impeccably polite, even when he is about to order the arrest of a smuggler.

Quote: "These papers seem to be in order. I'll just check a random can to make sure the inside matches the outside. If you don't mind."

Linden Bowland

Linden is the head of security for Sintra. She can usually be found in the security main office. She is an ex-captain of a military ship, and often talks in military slang, which has been picked up by most of security. She left her ship here after completely losing a leg. (If regeneration exists she has an unusual condition rendering her unable to use it.) She uses a cybernetic leg on most occasions, but has taught herself a complete unarmed combat fighting technique which she practices with only her natural body. She can beat 95 per cent of the population at unarmed combat, with or without her prosthesis. She also knows how to use a knife and various guns. The left side of her face is scarred, which she leaves uncovered. Strangers tend to find her unusually direct and a little disconcerting. She keeps a stunner on her belt at all times, allowing her to shoot first and ask questions later.

Quote: "Tell me everything you know about it, or I'll take you apart piece by piece. You know I mean it. Now start talking. Before I count to three. One, two..."

Tsong Li

Mr. Li runs a shop on the docks. He also owns The Seventh Star bar outright, having won it in a poker game ten years ago. Since then he believes his luck has changed and will not gamble or take any risks. He spends most of his time in his shop, buying and selling items with strangers. He refuses any possible gamble or chance-taking. He is tall and muscular, with red hair, black eyes and brown skin. He is a native Sintran.

Quote: "Ten credits, take it or leave it. No I will not do double or quits, good day to you."

Rachel Halsinger

Rachel is a young navigator who recently left the ship Cerise and is now looking for work. She is qualified in navigation and has basic piloting skills. She is 24 and has brown skin, hair and eyes. She is very ambitious and determined to be a success, and puts all her intelligence into getting better at navigation. She grew up on various ships and left Cerise because of a quarrel with her family. She spends most of her time in the registry attempting to find work and doing sims to improve her navigation skills. She has been beached on Sintra for three months and is reaching the end of her resources. She has rejected posts on several ships she considered not good enough, but is growing desperate.

Quote: "Are you looking for a navigator?"

Coyote Tenn

Coyote is the captain of her independent family ship, the Thunder on the Mountain. She is very tall, copper skinned, and has black hair and eyes. She is 58 years old and highly

intelligent. Her crew comprises 15 people, all related to her by blood. She is a sharp trader who makes money on all her deals, and is much respected among all those who know about ships. She has stopped fights between crews on the dock with her bare hands. Although she does not realise it, Coyote is regarded as a leader among the independents, and what she says effects how they think about things. She spends much of her time in space, travelling where the profit is and not keeping a regular route. She visits Sintra fairly frequently.
Quote: "Why don't you calm down a little and think about what you're doing here, son? On board the Thunder on the Mountain we count to ten before we open our mouths in anger. But when we lose our tempers there's no holding back."

Ro Cross

Ro is a calligrapher who works squatting cross-legged on the docks, writing letters for people, and making and selling decorative scrolls. He is an old man with no teeth, who can be hard to understand. He also offers computer services. Most people have been importuned by him to buy a lucky scroll. What many people don't realise, though, is that he is also an expert forger who can produce good quality forged papers by hand and on computer. He pretends not to understand if approached for this by strangers. The best way to deal with him is by using subtlety, or by way of a contact of his such as Mr. Li.
Quote: "Buy a lucky scroll, ma'am! Letters written, computer work! Any time!"

Note on Politics and Economics

Sintra is assumed to be an independent station which will accept anyone with legitimate papers docking to trade. It is also assumed to exist in a universe in which interstellar trade is a worthwhile pursuit, and where there are many inhabited planets and space stations. It orbits an inhabitable planet with a sapient native life form. It is thus a supply point for organics and exotic foodstuffs, wines and the like. Trade is carried out both by big corporations and by smaller independents. Other than that, the wider political and economic situation of the universe varies according to the particular campaign. If there are great alliances of stations Sintra will endeavour to be independent, or to shelter under the wing of some power which will allow it freedom.

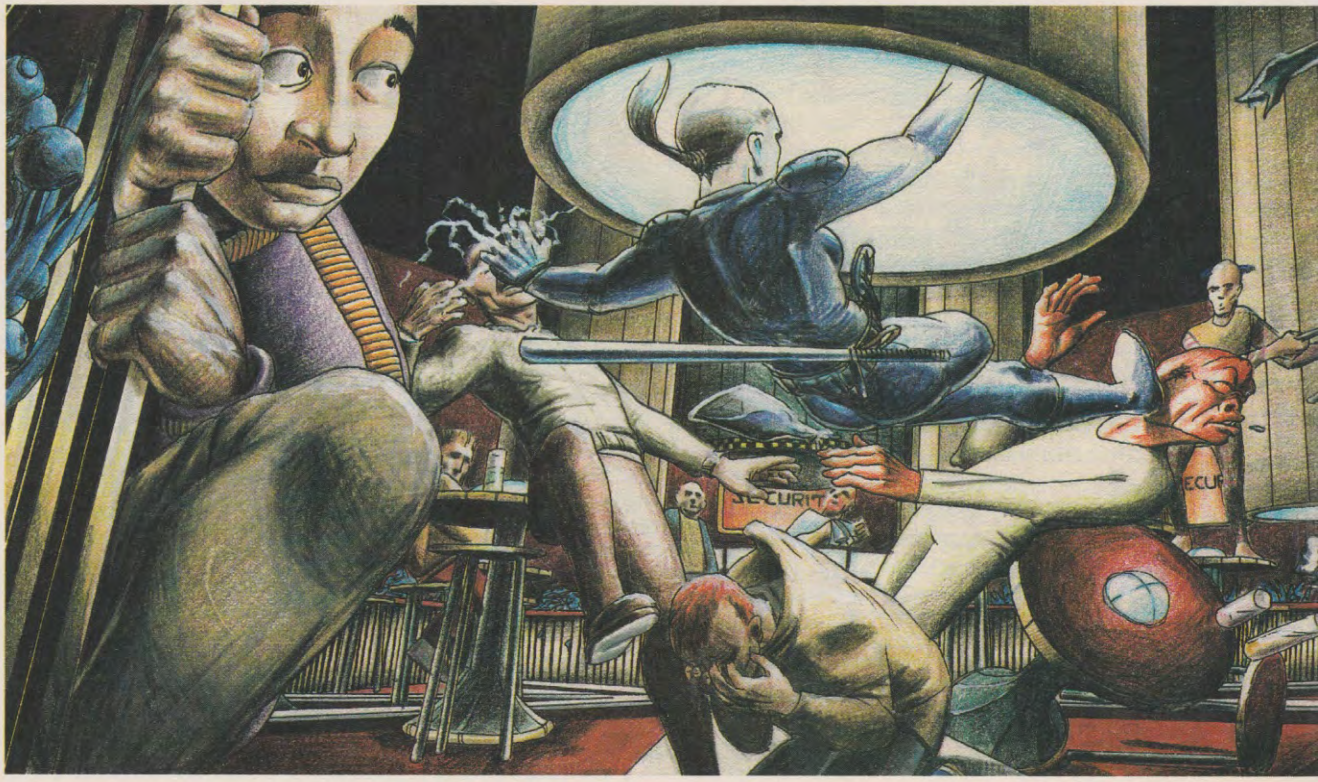
Note on Aliens

This encounter assumes that intelligent friendly spacefaring aliens exist and dock at human stations. No aliens are described in detail, but they are part of the background. If there are no such aliens in your universe, then leave them out.

Adventure seeds

Being Recruited

Morgan O'Brien is here looking for a crew. A newly forming party, or an existing party which does not have a ship, could begin a new life aboard Columbine. This could either be straight adventuring on a ship, or it could involve discovering more about its captain and mysterious past. What these mysteries are can vary according to the referee – Morgan may have stolen the Columbine, or he could have won it in a bet, inherited it from a relative, or been the last survivor aboard when it was attacked by space pirates. He might tell one of these stories while denying the truth. He will try to tempt people to join him,



without being frank about his background or his intentions. He will be reluctant to trust these people. It is also possible to play this scenario backwards, in which case the party has a ship and wishes to recruit a crew, and has to try to find trustworthy people.

Trading

It is possible to become rich trading to and fro from Sintra, and it is also possible to lose everything. The life of a small independent is perilous, and the exchange goes up and down according to rumours. When running a trading campaign it is best to let the trade be part of the background, except occasionally when it becomes vitally important. For instance, the party may want to bid to carry a certain piece of information because they want to know it, and the bidding might be fierce. Or there is a shortage of whatever they are bringing in, and there is competitive bidding for it, leaving them temporarily embarrassed by riches. Such a windfall will be fairly public. If they attempt to live the high life, make sure they are also pestered by indigents, panhandlers and begging letters from people who are adamant they are deserving causes. Equally it is possible to do the reverse and have them end up in the dock with cargo, which for some reason has become worthless and is now running up dock charges.

Feud

While you're minding your own business, relaxing in The Seventh Star, a member of another crew doesn't like the way you look. Anything is sufficient to start a bar brawl, but this one doesn't stop there. The other ship starts to spread rumours about you and spoil your trade. Maybe it even steals your deals and breaks into the cargo which is waiting to be delivered. A fight could easily break out in reception while two groups happen to be waiting at the same time. Any number of petty incidents can happen on Sintra. A feud that begins in a small way may end in a pitched battle in space.

The Gamble

Tsong Li thinks he has lost his luck and refuses to gamble. Then one day he is tricked into it, and loses. To fulfil the bet and avoid losing his shop and bar, he is supposed to bring back a particular item from another alien space station within a specified time limit. He hires the party either to take him there or to bring it to him.

Corporate War

Two corporations clash, and one of them hires you as independents to harass the other without it seeming to be involved. When things go wrong your employers may want the party 'dealt with' in order to keep it quiet.

Paper Chase

You're ready to leave Sintra, but your papers aren't in order – you're sent from one office to another filling in forms while a big corporation attempts to take over the ship.

Election Time

There is an election coming up in Sintra, and all the corners are being swept – the bright light of attention is shining just about everywhere and nothing can go on in the shadows. Bribery vanishes, cosy deals are suddenly news, and one party claims it will deal only with the corporations if it comes to power. Unfortunately, independents have no votes – can they get their point across?

Unknown Alien

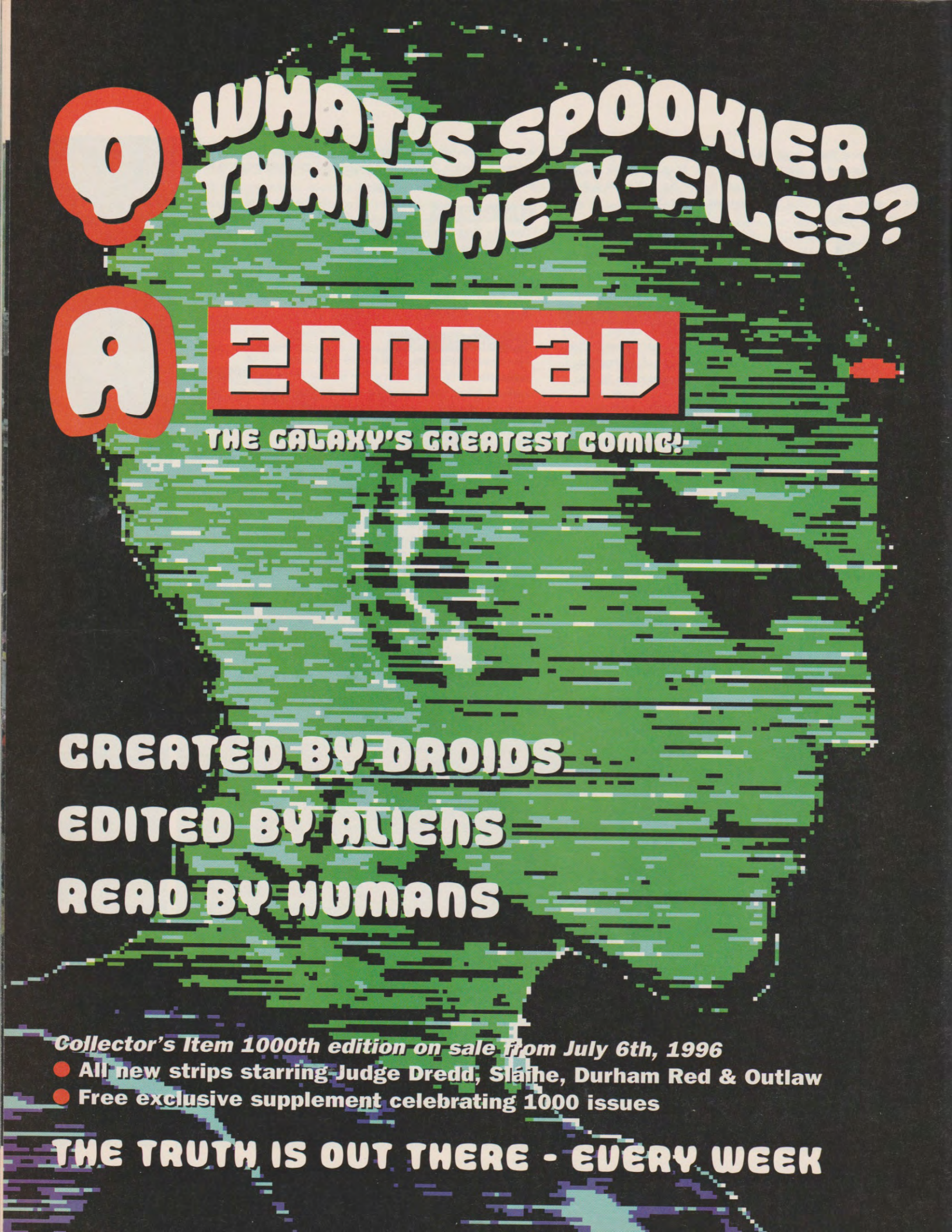
An alien of an unknown species has escaped from a ship and is hiding out in the station's ventilation systems. Several people have been found murdered, and panic and rumours are spreading of the hideous monster in the ducts. Is it really a malevolent creature, or is it just misunderstood? The party is hired to sort it out, or becomes involved against its will when one of its members goes missing.

For More Information

Traveller, *2300AD*, *GURPS Space*, and *Star Wars* are all good systems for playing space opera games, and they all contain backgrounds which are suitable for this particular station. Sintra was largely inspired by the *Alliance/Union* and *Chanur* books of C.J. Cherryh, which come highly recommended by **arcane** as great reads as well as sources of excellent adventure ideas.

Next month

It's back down to Earth with a thump in next month's thrilling encounter. Just what is that mega-corp' up to in its gargantuan HQ? What secrets is it trying so hard to hide? And how will your party of adventurers penetrate the bowls of its underground complex? Yep, you guessed it, we're taking you into the heart of cyberpunk territory in **arcane** 9, and it's mighty dangerous! Whatever happens, don't miss it when it hits the shelves on 12th July.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Issue 2 explored *AD&D: Skills & Powers*, previewed 1996's big releases, interviewed Richard Garfield (*Magic*'s inventor) and starred The Golden Dragon Inn, a 16-page Encounters special.

Issue 3 had a complete, free RPG called *Skool Roolz*, reviewed *Cybergeneration* and *Warhammer Fantasy Battle CD-ROM*, had a feature on making your characters more quirky and featured Mr Smith's Trans-dimensional Emporium as our Encounter.

Issue 4 explained roleplaying for beginners, discussed the role of acting in gaming, reviewed *MIddle Earth: The Wizards*, *Legend of the Five Rings* and *Night Below*, while Stormburg, the flying extra-planar city materialised in the Encounters section.

Issue 5 had Richard Garfield's thoughts on *Netrunner*, advice on wars, a feature on the roleplaying scene in Japan and reviewed *Vampire: The Dark Ages*, *Don't Look Back*, *Mage: The Ascension* and *Heresy*, as well as having The Train pull into the Encounters section.

Issue 6 explained why the Christian right want to ban roleplaying games, took a look at the strange worlds of Steampunk, and reviewed *Netrunner*, the best card game since *Magic*, *GURPS Goblins* and *Space Hulk 2nd Edition*. Oh, and we gave you your very own Keep by way of the Encounter.

Issue 7 explored the worlds of terror with our cover feature on how to create the perfect horror scenario. It looked at how you can introduce time travel into your games, sent to you the Prison with the month's Encounter, poked fun at the way roleplayers view their dice and reviewed the best RPG this year: *Conspiracy X*.

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THE MONTH IN GAMES

We've got that déjà vu feeling...

WHY, YOU MAY BE THINKING, is **arcane** reviewing a game which has been out for over a decade? We refer, of course, to *Pendragon*, the game of medieval combat and Arthenturian legend which was first released by Chaosium way back in the mid eighties. Well, we're reviewing it because we think you ought to know about its reissue – *Pendragon* has been out of print for almost two years now, and many of you are new to roleplaying, after all...

Our policy is to review honestly, fairly and incisively all the major roleplaying, CCG and related game releases. If it's praised in **arcane** you know you can buy it with confidence.

All our reviews are by experienced gamers and independent, professional journalists; people who play the games you do. This definitely is *the* place for definitive reviews of games and expansions.

Oh, and a quick note about the prices. A lot of the stuff reviewed in **arcane** is imported from the USA by a number of different distributors, so the prices we've given must be viewed as guidelines only.

Pick of the month

"One of the best roleplaying experiences"

Pendragon
Page 56

Page 60

"The best thing to happen to Magic"

The Icons

Each review in **arcane** is identified with a rather nifty icon showing what kind of game it is. Here's what they mean:

Roleplaying systems

Collectable card games and expansions

Board games, miniature systems

Dice games and expansions

Computer games and utilities

Books and supplements

The Scores

Everything reviewed in **arcane** gets a mark out of 10. Here's a guide to what the individual marks represent...

Score 10/10 Perfect. There's simply nothing better.
Score 9/10 Excellent, a classic. Highly recommended.
Score 8/10 Very good, with few problems. Recommended.
Score 7/10 Good, but not exceptional.
Score 6/10 Above average, but not without problems.
Score 5/10 Average, or a mixture of good and bad.
Score 4/10 Below average, but not without merit.
Score 3/10 Poor, crucially flawed in some way.
Score 2/10 Very poor, should be avoided.
Score 1/10 Appallingly bad, no redeeming features at all.

arcane seal of approval

Each month we fight and argue among ourselves to select that one extra-special product most deserving of your money and the coveted **arcane** accolade.

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Pendragon 4th

A roleplaying game | £17.95 | Chaosium | 001 510 547 7681 | Out now

They were "the goodliest fellowship of holy knights whereof the world holds record." Are you ready to join them?

Ah – Camelot, Camelot! The Round Table, the Quest for the Holy Grail, knights in shining armour impaling each other for the love of fair maidens, and hovering in the background, the sinister figure of Morgana Le Fey. For over a thousand years, the Arthurian myth has inspired us to produce great works of art. And *First Knight*.

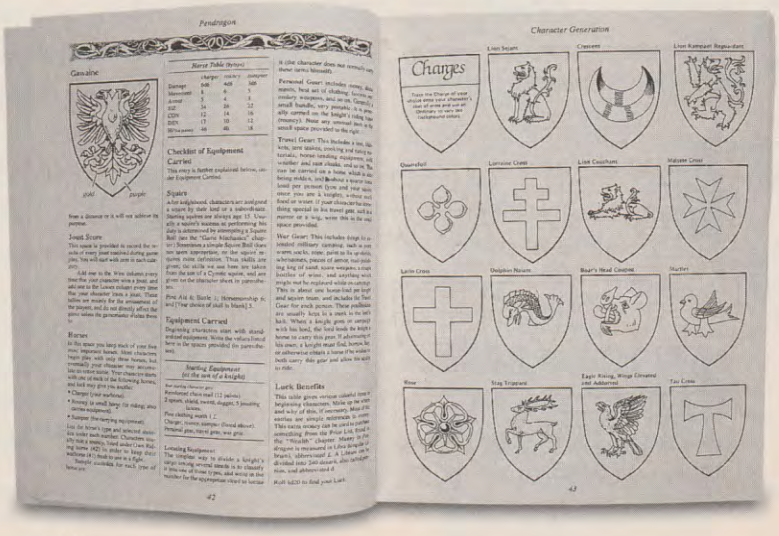
"Very probably," you may say, "but what about the actual game?"

The first thing to get straight is that if all you want to do is run a couple of fantasy adventures set in Arthur's Britain, you should look elsewhere. This is not a wet-Sunday-afternoon type of game.

Pendragon has something loftier in mind – an RPG that takes in the whole history of King Arthur's reign, from the pulling of the sword in the stone to the final bloodbath at Camlaan, more than 50 years later.

That's not to say that PC knights won't slay dragons and topple tyrants a-

"Every rule and every bit of background meshes together to produce a game in which you can't help but think and act like one of King Arthur's knights."



Edition

plenty. That's what knights are for. But the game places great emphasis on the things they do when they aren't having adventures – things like hunting, running their estates, courting a wife, raising a son, attending feasts and tournaments, serving in the wars and participating in court intrigue. Such things develop over months and years of play. A good *Pendragon* campaign ends up feeling like a sort of epic soap opera.

In order to create this sweeping timescale, *Pendragon* assumes that each session of play represents a year of game time; effectively, the game deals only with the highlights of a character's life. If your group plays a session each week, then the callow youth of 21 who you role up in the first session will be a sprightly 73 year-old after a year of play – assuming, of course, that the annual round of jousting and wars, and *Pendragon's* combat system, hasn't already cut him off in his prime.

Furthermore, a *Pendragon* player is not only interested in what his character *does*, but in what sort of a person he is – his emotions and his inner life. For this reason, the rules define characters' personalities in terms of traits and passions. Traits are pairs of attributes which describe a character: someone might have 'Valorous-6/Cowardly-14'. At dramatic moments, a referee can require

a player to roll against these traits on a D20. Confronted by an ogre, the knight in the above example would have to roll a six or less to stand his ground. Hopefully, most knights would not be this cowardly, but they will still fall short of the ideal of the Round Table. Struggling to achieve that ideal is as much a part of the game as struggling to defeat the marauding Saxons. You know that a knight is meant to be humble, but that 'Proud-17/Modest-3' means that you can't help boasting.

A passion, on the other hand, is something that the PC feels very deeply about: 'Hate Sir Mordred-14' might be a typical passion. Characters can make passion roles at crucial moments in the game, and, if successful, become 'inspired', which gives them dramatic bonuses to their skills. (If, on the other hand, they fumble a passion role, they go mad.)

This means that a simple combat – two knights slogging it out on a bridge – can have huge roleplaying potential. A knight called Sir Quentin is challenging all comers, and you know that Quentin killed your father. He is a better warrior than you. You role on your 'Love Family' passion, and are inspired. You fight heroically against him, and wound him. He rolls on his Valorous trait, fails and begs for mercy. As a Christian knight, you should give him a quarter, but as your father's son, you should slay him. What do you do? Far more depth than orc-bashing, wouldn't you say?

Pendragon almost perfectly achieves what it sets out to do. Every rule and every bit of background meshes together to produce a game in which you can't help but think and act – and even feel – like one of King Arthur's knights. Running a full campaign, and seeing the young squires from the first session growing up to be the veterans in the final battle, has been one of the best experiences in my roleplaying career. And, contrary to popular belief, you won't have to push the pram a lot.

Andrew Rilstone

And the players said...

NICK: "Personality traits sound like the stupidest idea you've ever heard of – but dammit, they work!"

FLASH: "I was impressed with the way the game dealt with long campaigns and provided a structure for your character's life."

SAM: "The characters are too samey, and the personality traits too restrictive."

CHRIS: "It's the only game I know in which a failed love affair earns more Glory points that a successful one."

Score 9/10

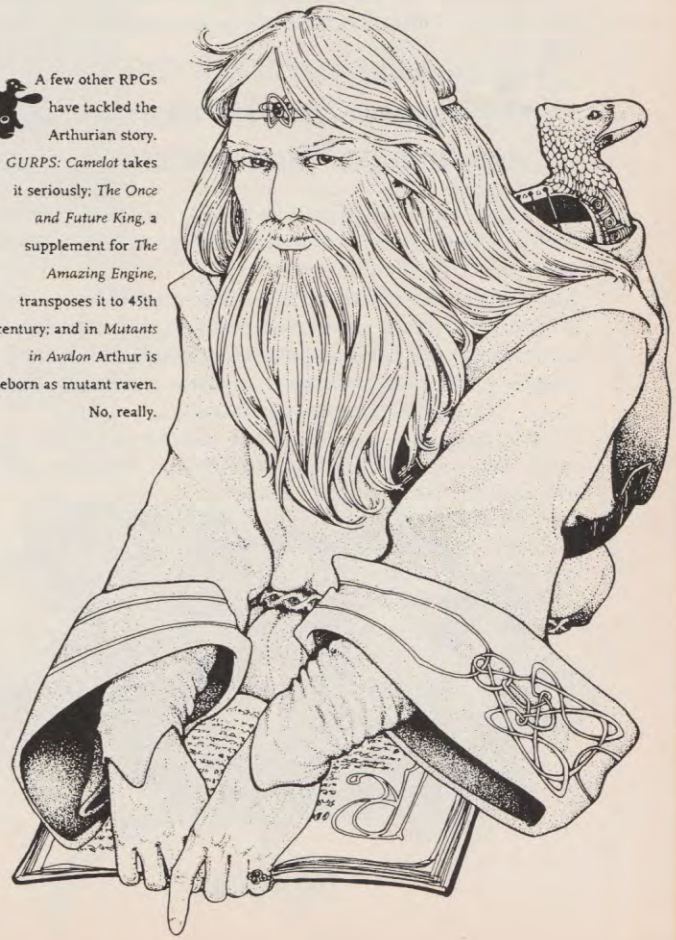
So What's New?

Pendragon 4th Edition **is a re-editing of the 1990 3rd edition and its supplement** ***Knights Adventurous.*** **The two volumes have been integrated, making this hefty 350-page tome good value for money – although it's essentially the same game as before. It contains both the basic character generation system from** ***Pendragon 3rd*** **(in which you generate a bog-standard Christian knight from Salisbury) and the more complicated and open-ended** ***Knights Adventurous*** **one (where you can play pagans, squires and even foreigners). Even the system for running mass battles is much as it was in the 3rd edition – that is to say, after four tries it's still completely incomprehensible.**

The only thing that's completely new is a 30-page section which provides, for the first time, rules for magic-using PCs. Although it would be perfectly possible for an imaginative player to run a wizard as a subsidiary character, I imagine this will be rare. ***Pendragon*** **is still fundamentally a knights' game.**

In Geoffrey of Monmouth's 11th century Latin best-seller *The History of the Kings of Britain*, King Arthur appeared not only as a magical sword called Excalibur, but also as a magic spear... called Ron.

A few other RPGs have tackled the Arthurian story. *GURPS: Camelot* takes it seriously; *The Once and Future King*, a supplement for *The Amazing Engine*, transposes it to 45th century; and in *Mutants in Avalon* Arthur is reborn as mutant raven. No, really.



Bleak House:

The Death of Rudolph Van Richten

A campaign set for *AD&D Ravenloft* £15.99

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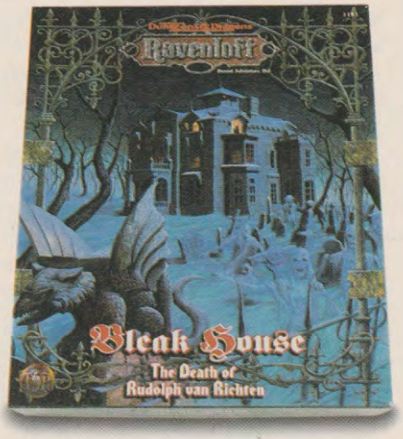


why wasn't Dickens ever this much fun?

Rudolph Van Richten is one of the most famous characters in the *Ravenloft* world, and has appeared in numerous scenarios and books.

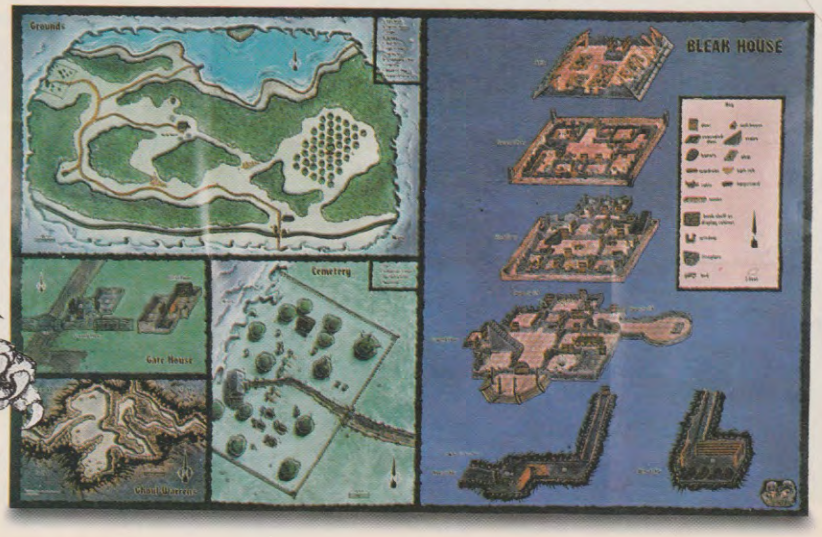
Only the brave need apply for this, the rip-roaring finale of *Ravenloft's* most famous do-gooder, because only the lucky will survive. The *Bleak House* campaign ranks as one of *Ravenloft's* best ever, bundling together classic horror tales, rewarding roleplaying and the resurrection of some fine game mechanics. In his heyday, Rudolph Van Richten was the hardest man in the Demi-Plane of Dread, but in old age his physical and mental powers had begun to ebb somewhat. Is senility the sole reason for Van Richten's demise, or is there something much more sinister afoot?

This three-adventure campaign has a distinct *Star Wars* feel. Adventure One, Whom Fortune Would Destroy, is great. Adventure Two, The Baron, is a necessary but unsatisfying transition. While Adventure Three, Homecoming, offers the equivalent payoff of a second Death Star assault, Ewok battle, Duel with Darth Vader and then some.

Whom Fortune Would Destroy plays the madness card. The players find themselves stranded on a remote island and the 'guests' of a revered psychologist. The treatments the good doctor dishes out seem effective but disturbing – both patients and staff are forced to wear all-covering robes and clay masks. In a swirling mass of faceless confusion and obvious insanity, the players' nerves are tested as they race to discover the secret of the Asylum before things turn nasty. And they'd better be quick, because when the going gets grim they'll be too busy hanging on to their sanity to worry about trivial matters – such as escape or Van Richten.

"It doles out vicious mental torture with such wanton disregard for the consequences that less mature players will feel personally slighted and abused."

A harrowing and invasive scenario, Whom Fortune Would Destroy pushes close to the bounds of gaming good taste. It doles out vicious mental torture with such wanton disregard for the



Film Fun

The three adventures that make up *Bleak House* shamelessly draw on some of the nastiest, goriest and downright splendid films found in the vid shop's splatter section.

Homecoming's Bleak House brings together elements of *Amityville Horror, Poltergeist, House* and *The Changeling* for its room warping, eerie blood dripping and echo in the bath-tub tap, tap, tapping. While *Night of the Living Dead, Dawn of the Dead* and *Day of the Dead* can be found on continuous rerun in the back garden.

The Baron's cityscape has overtones of *Interview with the Vampire, Serpent and the Rainbow, Masque of the Red Death, Brazil* and the entire *Hammer Dracula* pantheon (with the possible exception of *Dracula 1972AD*).

Whom Fortune Would Destroy's Asylum clamps you down for some serious moments from *Shock Corridor, The Island of Doctor Moreau, White Zombie, 12 Monkeys, Frankenstein* and even *One Flew over the Nest.*

So, if you've ever cursed American teenagers for walking into rooms without turning the lights on, why not see if you can do any better?

consequences that less mature players will feel personally slighted and abused. The claustrophobic fear engendered within the walls of the Asylum builds up fast, and the weak will soon see their characters devoured by the horrors around them.

The Baron relocates players to a city and is the weakest of the three scenarios. Lacking the focus and forced pace of a closed setting, the pressure's let off. It's probably a necessary evil, as veterans of the Asylum will need some time to get their characters' minds and bodies back together, but the change is too sudden.

That's not to say that the characters aren't in deep trouble in the town, or that they won't have to be at their best to progress. This time the players are the hunters, following up leads gleaned from the madhouse in a bid to find out what fate has in store for Rudolph Van Richten. And, as the plot thickens, The Baron digs up one of Richten's oldest foes, which pitches the players in a deadly battle.

Homecoming draws the players through the mists and back to Van Richten's family estate, Bleak House. It's here that the horror side of *Ravenloft* really kicks in, and it's terrifyingly good.

Potent evil stalks Van Richten's home and the players must race against the clock to battle evil spirits, solve a mystery, stay sane, save Van Richten and get out alive. All this is played against a backdrop of real eeriness and thunderous storms.

As a stand-alone scenario Homecoming would be strong, but as the climax to a three-parter it's near perfect. Uniting the themes of the earlier scenarios and drawing on the full Van Richten legend, it hammers home the horror harder than nails in a coffin.

The artwork is not the greatest strength of *Bleak House*, being more than a little average. Despite this, it does manage to get across the right atmosphere, as does the layout.

Fans of *Ravenloft* should also check out the re-printed *Monstrous Compendium Appendices*, reviewed on page 74.

The *Bleak House* campaign is a strong blend of the old and the new. Haunted houses and deserted islands are hardly original *Ravenloft* concepts, but they're delivered in a confident and coherent style. There's a new monster at the core of the game which is perfectly set up to stiff the 'been there, killed that' brigade, and the three chief bad guys make the most of the Van Richten mythos.

In the cold light of day – as opposed to the oppressive darkness the campaign so elegantly conjures up – there are a few problems with *Bleak House*. Van Richten, for instance, seems to have forgotten what he learned from Dr Illhousen in the *Nightmare Lands* expansion. The impact of the shipwreck scenario is marred if you've played *Neither Man Nor Beast* and the manuals suffer from clumsy artwork. But those are points for pedants.

Bleak House is a campaign that will destroy many characters and leave survivors staggering and scarred. Yet those who roam the Demi-Plane of Dread have asked for that, they've opted to explore the nastier end of gaming and enjoy recreating famous moments of horror. *Bleak House* delivers this in spades. I just wish I'd never read it – because then I could play it!

Trenton Webb

Score 8/10

Alliances

An expansion set for *Magic: The Gathering* and *Ice Age*

£1.90 for a 12-card booster pack | Wizards of the Coast

0345 125599 | Out now

changing the face of *magic* as we know it?

The next expansion set for *Magic: The Gathering* will be launched in September. It's a stand-alone set (somewhat like *Ice Age* is) and is to be called *Mirage*. Check out **arcane** 9 for more details – on sale Friday 12th July.

Of the recent expansion sets for *Magic: The Gathering* (namely *Homelands, Chronicles* and *Fallen Empires), Alliances* has inspired me the most to go about the lengthy task of designing half a dozen or so new decks from scratch, and playing with them into the early hours of the morning. Why am I discounting the *Ice Age* set from this list?

"*Alliances* cards will, I think, be rapidly adopted by every serious *Magic* player."

Because it was a stand-alone more than an expansion set, and as such it introduced entirely new aspects to the game of *Magic* – there were the cantrips, and of course the whole idea of cumulative upkeep.

Death Spark
Instant
Death Spark deals 1 damage to target creature or player.
At the end of your upkeep, if Death Spark is in your graveyard with a creature card directly above it, you may pay 1 to put Death Spark into your hand.
Illus. Marie Tedin
Feast or Famine
Instant
Bury target non-black, non-artifact creature or put a Zombie token into play. Treat this token as a 2/2 black creature.
"The living cannot understand the benefits of death."
—Chaeska, Keeper of Tresserhorn
Illus. Pete Venters

Alliances is as much an expansion for *Ice Age* as it is *Magic* as a whole. It follows the theme established in *Ice Age* and is set in the same part of the *Magic* mulitverse. The 'feel' of the cards definitely falls in line with that of *Ice Age*, and the pace of play in an *Alliances*-heavy deck is every bit as fast as that of an all *Ice Age* creation.

Nature's Blessing
Enchantment
••: Choose and discard a card from your hand to have target creature gain banding, first strike, or trample or get a +1/+1 counter. "Be open to the blessings, whatever their form."
—Kayya, Elder Druid of the Juniper Order
Illus. Sandra Everingham
Lim-Dûl's High Guard
Summon Skeleton
First strike
1: Regenerate
"Death does not prevent us from service to our absent master. As long as Tresserhorn stands, so shall we."
—Chaeska, Keeper of Tresserhorn
Illus. Anson Maddocks
2/1

Alliances introduces a host of new card types into the mix. There are cards which enable you to remove other cards in your hand from the game instead of having to pay a casting cost (and that's way powerful – first round, no mana, but you've got a red 4/4 creature which would cost two red mana and three colourless to bring out. Instead you can discard a simple Mons Goblin Raiders from your hand and you've got that creature in play before your opponent has even had a go). There are also cards which allow you to discard cards at the top of your deck in order to power their effects. This makes for extremely quick games, and to avoid falling foul of Millstone decks you're going to have to find ways of recycling your cards efficiently.

Another new card type is the creature which doesn't deal normal damage when it's not blocked, but which causes the player to lose life – a loss that can't be prevented. These cards are the perfect counter to the venerable *Circles of Protection* and similar cards, and are bound to quickly establish themselves as the most valuable cards in the set (look out for the Keeper of Tresserhorn, a black, rare, 6/6 creature with this special ability). Imagine making these creatures unblockable with a suitable enchantment, and putting a Resurrection enchantment on them too (just in case) – they would very soon become serious thorns in the side of any white/green-based creature deck, or any other deck for that matter. These cards alone are going to have a significant effect on the way we play *Magic*, making us think about more different ways of protecting our life points than the old Circles.

Soldevi Sentry
Artifact Creature
1: Regenerate. Target opponent may draw a card.
"Our newfound security enables us to turn more of our attentions to the wonders that lie deep within the soil."
—Arcum Dagsson, Soldevi Machinist
Reprisal
Bury target creature with power 4 or greater.
"The meek shall fight as one, and they shall overcome even the greatest of foes."
—Halvor Aronston, Kjeldoran Priest
Phyrexian War Beast
Artifact Creature
If Phyrexian War Beast leaves play, sacrifice a land, and Phyrexian War Beast deals 1 damage to you.
"Deal with the spawn of Phyrexia cautiously; only with time may we control them."
—Arcum Dagsson, Soldevi Machinist

Physically the cards are of the same high standard that we've come to expect from Wizards of the Coast. The artwork, on the other hand, is variable. Though some of it is stunning, especially that which has been done by Byron Wackwitz in his highly realistic style, overall the quality isn't as good as it was in the *Ice Age* set, which is a great pity.

One of the greatest features about the *Alliances* set is that, even though there are some seriously powerful cards, there are none that could be considered to damage the balance of the game. There are checks and balances built into the framework of most of the cards (especially the cheaper ones), which make their use something to think twice about. Take Soldevi Sentry as an example – it's a 1/1 artifact creature that costs just one mana (colourless) to get out, and you can regenerate it for just one colourless mana! However, each time you use the regenerative effect, your opponent has the choice of drawing a card, which, of course, may give him the upper hand (that is, unless you're playing with plenty of Black Vices to discourage him from drawing in the first place).

As is only right, there is no single colour which gets the crop of the powerful cards in the set – it's an even split. Perhaps the only area which suffers at all is the collection of artifacts. In testing the set I went about the task of building an *Ice Age/Alliances* artifact deck, and I had severe trouble making it work. Perhaps I was unlucky in the mix I ended up with (I was drawing from a stock of approximately 700 *Ice Age* cards and some 500 or so *Alliances),* but the artifacts I encountered seemed to work best in a mixed colour deck rather than on their own.

Want three *Alliances* cards for free? Then you want to get hold of the last issue of **arcane** where we gave away three of these excellent cards – turn to page 53 to find out how you can place your order!

You Want These Cards

There are some cards in the *Alliances* set which every *Magic* player must have. Check these out and just think of the possibilities...

Keep those flying creatures in check, then swarm in!

Agent of Stromgald
Summon Knight
: Add to your mana pool. Play this ability as an interrupt.
"The 'fabled' Order of Stromgald is cast to the four winds, lost for all time. I, for one, give them no thought."
—General Varchild
1/1

How about turning that mountain into a dual land – suits you sir!

Keeper of Tresserhorn
Summon Keeper
If Keeper of Tresserhorn attacks and is not blocked, it deals no damage to defending player this turn and that player loses 2 life. Effects that prevent or redirect damage cannot be used to counter this loss of life.
6/6

He pours scorn on your opponent's CoP: Black!

Royal Herbalist
Summon Cleric
2: Remove the top card of your library from the game to gain 1 life.
"Just as an Herbalist heals a wound, so must we heal the rift between Balduvia and Kjeldor."
—King Darien of Kjeldor
1/1

Hugely useful for its tiny casting cost – and vital in the end-game.

Fyndhorn Druid
Summon Druid
If Fyndhorn Druid is put into the graveyard the same turn it was blocked, gain 4 life.
"All struggles ultimately require sacrifice. It's just that some sacrifices are dearer than others."
—Jaeuhl Carthalion, Juniper Order Advocate
2/2

This'll work wonders in any hard-hitting green creature deck.

Taste of Paradise
Sorcery
Gain 3 life.
Gain 3 life for each you pay in addition to the casting cost.
"There is, in each of us, the potential to heal and the gift of renewed life."
—Kayna, Elder Druid of the Juniper Order

Gain 15 life for just ten mana? That'll save a few games...

Taste of Paradise
Instant
Choose a card from your hand and shuffle that card into your library to draw two cards at the beginning of the next turn's upkeep.
"All the knowledge of Lubchani could not protect its sages from the Brothers' War."
—Gerda Aagenkmet, Archmage of the Unseen

There are cards within the *Alliances* set which are really going to shake up the game of *Magic,* forcing players to reconsider some of the traditional cards combinations, defence tactics and aggressive routines, and because of this it's a highly refreshing release. As with most *Magic* expansions, the true power of some of the cards can take a while to work out, and may take some experimenting with deck designs, but this is no bad thing. *Alliance* cards will, I think, be rapidly adopted by every serious *Magic* player, and the set as a whole is likely to establish itself a reputation as being the best thing to happen to *Magic* since the early, pre-fourth edition expansions.

Paul Pettengale

Score 8/10

The Golden D

A sourcebook for *Call of Cthulhu* | Pagan Publishing

001 206 232 2519 | Out now | £12.95

A similar secret society has appeared in *Call of Cthulhu* before. Anyone remember the Hermetic Order of the Silver Twilight, from the soon to be re-released *Shadows of Yog-Sothoth* campaign set?

Journey back in time to the golden age of Victoria, when a healthy interest in the occult was just the sign of a well-rounded personality.

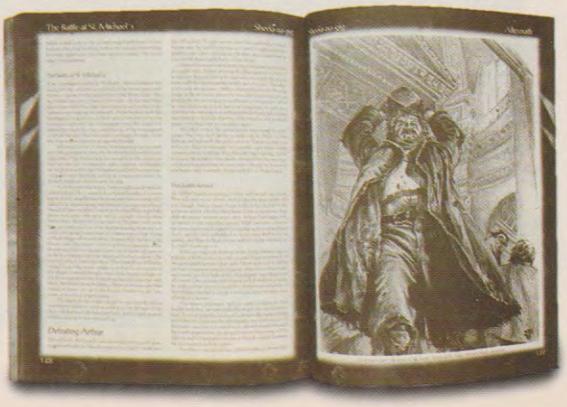
I've had a very hard time writing this review. But it's unprofessional of me to tell you that; you don't want to know about my problems, you want to know whether or not you should buy *The Golden Dawn*. And that's what's been causing me trouble, you see. *The Golden Dawn* is great, fantastic, clever, well-researched and in places indispensable; but only in places.

"*The Golden Dawn* is fantastic, clever, well-researched... but only in places."

For those of you who don't know, the Golden Dawn was a secret society formed in Britain by three distinguished Freemasons in 1888. Its purpose was to act as a kind of 'university of the occult': a place where people could get together, discuss their occult knowledge and exchange information. It had a chequered history until it finally closed in 1914 after many internal power struggles, nationwide scandals and a fair share of famous members passing through its portals. These included the infamous 'great beast' Aleister Crowley, the Irish Nationalist and poet William Butler Yeats and the actress Florence Farr Emery.

Now this sourcebook is primarily aimed at creating investigators who are active members of the Golden Dawn, which sounds all well and good. However, and I cannot stress this enough, the Golden Dawn portrayed in this sourcebook is *not* involved in anything related to the *Cthulhu* mythos. The authors have deliberately set it up this way in an attempt to be true to the history of the Golden Dawn. Now while this is an admirable viewpoint, in practice it means that even for the four scenarios presented in the book, the Golden Dawn itself is never any more than a peripheral to the action. Which feels a bit weird when you've bought a sourcebook called *The Golden Dawn*. And the very same problem afflicts the information that's presented in the section about the Golden Dawn. It's all very dry and historically accurate, without presenting any real hooks to get the players interested. There are no maps of any of the Golden Dawn's buildings or temples, for example. And it throws up quite a few problems for the referee down the road. Suppose the players become involved in the Golden Dawn and their investigations reveal all sorts of *Cthulhu*-related tomfoolery. Pretty soon the entire Golden Dawn is going to hear about it and want to know more, and then the referee will be faced with the unenviable task of keeping 300 dedicated and powerful people from discovering more. So while the Golden Dawn initially seems like a great idea to base a *Cthulhu* campaign around, in practice the one offered here fails to be suitably convincing.

The players can learn real occult magic and cast spells that increase in power as



Crammed Full

One thing that *The Golden Dawn* is not short of is material. There are 192 large-format pages full of information for the referee here, covering a wide variety of topics:

- Victorian London: a short reference guide to the greatest city of its time with maps and everything. Reprinted from the out-of-print *Cthulhu by Gaslight*.
- The Golden Dawn: Descriptions of the order, its history and its most prominent members spread over 50 pages.
- Four superb scenarios that take up more than 89 pages.
- A 3-page bibliography – yikes!
- Players' versions of *The Golden Dawn* material.
- Creating Victorian characters, abridged from *Cthulhu by Gaslight* and brought into line with the *5th Edition* rules.
- Miscellany containing new skills, new spells, guidelines for photography in the Victorian ages and swordfighting rules.
- A *Golden Dawn* character sheet.
- Calendars for the years 1893-1900.

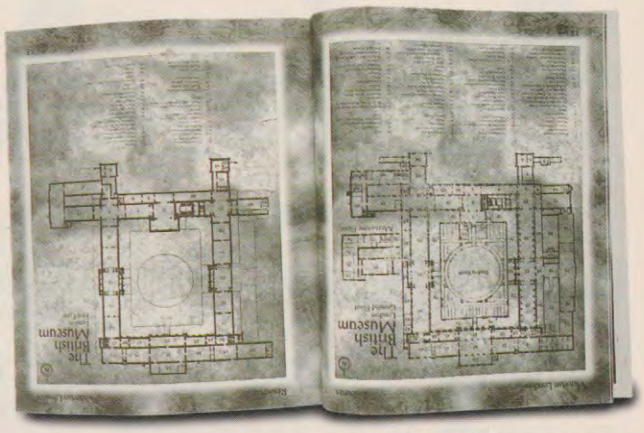
All in all a pretty splendid collection, and one that no self-respecting referee can afford to ignore.

awn

they progress through the various circles of the society. This is a significant part of the Golden Dawn, as it's presented here, and may cause some referees a few problems. Full members of the Golden Dawn will also be able to visit the astral plane and conduct investigations there. Whether this sort of thing is what you want in your campaign is, of course, up to you, but I had serious qualms about quite a lot of this material because I was concerned that it would give my players a little too much power rather too easily. The spells that are obtainable in *Call of Cthulhu* are normally very hard to come by, and require a rather more significant sacrifice by the player than simply joining a secret society.

Luckily, however, the Golden Dawn is not even really at the centre of this sourcebook; the information dealing with the organisation is less than half of the material presented. And among the remaining hotch-potch of ideas and scenarios are some real gems. For a start, there's all the information from the out-of-print *Cthulhu by Gaslight* needed to run a 1890s investigator, so those referees who can't wait any longer for the rumoured Chaosium supplement re-release will find this very useful.

There are also four scenarios: an introductory one which is fairly good, and three absolutely superb ones, two of which are linked together and concern a plot so vast and frightening that it would have made a much better subject matter for the whole book. It's based around an idea so simple, clever and terrifying that it's a wonder no-one's ever used it before. Unfortunately, to spill the beans on what the idea is would completely spoil these scenarios for any player, so I can't. Rest assured, though. There's enough material in these two scenarios, 'Hell hath no fury' by Steve Hatherley and 'Sheela-na-gig' by John Tynes, to base an entire campaign around. The John Tynes scenario in particular is an absolute gem, and a must for any referee. Even if you don't ever play it, just reading it will fill you with excellent ideas and provide you with several masterfully portrayed NPCs.



Aleister Crowley's middle name was Edward. Hmm... 'Teddy' Crowley; that doesn't sound so frightening, does it?

I was really excited about the idea of using the Golden Dawn as the main feature of a *Cthulhu* campaign before I received this sourcebook, and hidden within an initial disappointment is quite a discovery. And one that I can't tell you about. That's why this review was so difficult. Anyway, if you want my advice you'll go out and buy this sourcebook – just don't expect the Golden Dawn to be a major theme of your campaign, it's more of an interesting way to meet unusual people and, through that, smoothly introduce your players to some of your scenarios. There's certainly some excellent information about the Golden Dawn contained in this book, but if you're at all like me, you'll be keeping your players at the outskirts of the Golden Dawn's power structure. Beyond that I can heartily recommend this sourcebook for its superb scenarios, even though you might think it's a bit expensive for that alone.

Steve Faragher

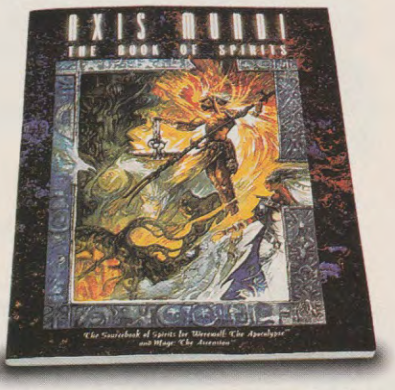
John Tynes, as well as being the head honcho of Pagan Games, also works for Daedalus Entertainment, publishers of *Shadowfist* and *Feng Shui*. (There, I've managed to mention *Feng Shui* in this issue – do I win a prize?) What a busy fellow he must be.

Score 7/10

Axis Mundi: Th

A supplement for *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* and *Mage: The Ascension*

£10.99 | **White Wolf** | **001 404 292 1819** | **Out now**



add a spiritual dimension to your *werewolf* campaign...

Bone Gnawers provide most of the humour – walking rubbish heaps and rat spirits petitioned by the Rite of Pizza, where a pack displays unity by agreeing on the toppings.

It is slightly misleading to describe this as 'The Sourcebook of Spirits, for *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*' because this is by no means a definitive piece of work. Rather, it is an expansion on the already existing rules, and an addition of totem and nature spirits. None of the really big guns are included here – instead the emphasis is on the rank and file that Garou will deal with on a regular basis.

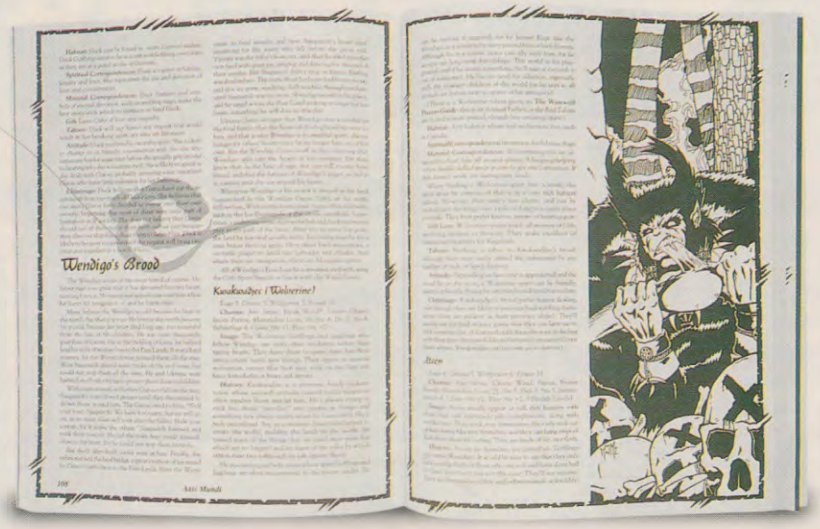
The introduction explains that the Axis Mundi, or World Tree, is the spiritual centre of the world in the shamanistic tradition with which Garou magic is identified. Chapter One: History introduces one of the central precepts of the book, the idea of History as Myth. Storytelling is vital to the Garou, not just to pass on information, but for the way it shapes their perception of that information. Here we have the story of the creation of the spirits, of their naming, the creation of the Gauntlet and of the First Fetish.

"Gifts, fetishes, totems, knowledge – almost all of the Garou powers are derived from spirits, which transforms character advancement from game statistics into a vibrant roleplaying experience."

Chapter Two: The Pact introduces the other key precept – that spirits are central to Garou life, as allies and teachers. It explains the different types of pacts between Garou and spirits, and why they exist. It defines the concept of chiminage, or payment in kind, and the dangers of breaking a pact. The idea of spirit pacts is nothing new, but is superbly realised here. Gifts, fetishes, totems and knowledge – almost all of the Garou powers are derived from spirits, which transforms character advancement from game statistics into a vibrant roleplaying experience. The authors are aware of the extra effort this will involve and offer several different approaches.

Having established that Garou are dependant on spirits for their gifts, the bulk of the book introduces about 100 new spirits that can be petitioned. Game statistics are provided, including charms or spirit powers, but the emphasis is definitely on the roleplaying aspects of dealing with spirits. A spirit's biography includes a description of its forms, its history told as a Garou myth and its habitat, providing many new locations in the Umbra, or spirit world. Guidelines are provided for the aspects the spirit is associated with, the rites needed to summon them, the gifts and knowledge they can teach, and the taboos that govern their behaviour. The most extensive notes are on their chiminage, the services they expect in return for

e Book of Spirits



their help, which will often take the shape of quests and challenges that can provide dozens of new story ideas.

Chapter Three: Lords of the Quarters covers half the page count and catalogues not the totem spirits of the Garou tribes, but their broods, or servants, who are more likely to answer a summons. Each brood draws a strong identity from its master, so the servants of Fenris are warlike spirits from Norse mythology while those of the Cockroach are small spirits of knowledge and survival. However, there is enough flexibility within each brood that they are not one-dimensional or stereotypical. One of Fenris' brood is the Hrafn, raven spirits who teach the wisdom of humour. While the emphasis is on character, the authors are careful to provide spirits to teach all the gifts each tribe requires. Nor are Garou restricted to the Totem brood of their tribe.

Chapter Four: Mountains and water covers spirits of nature – plant, rock, the moon and elementals, old and new. It suggests the idea of psychedelic plant totems, including Father Peyote, which is a logical extension of the shamanistic theme and conjures up intriguing roleplaying opportunities. The description of elementals is limited and the urban elementals of metal, glass, electricity and plastic are given very little character. This is disappointing because they are a potentially fascinating development of traditional concepts.

Chapter Five: The Others is a potpourri of spirits who don't fit in elsewhere. Ancestor spirits give character to the Garou notion of shared experience and the background of Past Life. Enigmatics are spirits of mystery and dream, Englings are sacramental spirits who sacrifice themselves to provide Gnosis, and Epiphlings embody concepts central to Garou life, such as death, war and courage. Appendix: New Charms is just that, an appendix of 30 new spirit powers, including Break Wind, the kind of thing that happens when designers are locked up for too long.

Dealing with spirits has always been a part of *Werewolf*, but by expanding the ideas of pacts and chiminage, *Axis Mundi* makes it central to the game. Garou can no longer take their powers for granted, but must bargain for them with the spirits. This encourages players to develop more complex relationships with spirits, as friends, teachers or uneasy allies. It also expands the role of Theurge and Philodox who become power brokers between Garou and spirit.

The success of *Axis Mundi* is that it brings this idea so admirably to life with a wealth of examples on how to make each spirit a new and vivid roleplaying experience. The spirits included here range from the whimsical and comical, through the sinister and violent, to the completely abstract and bizarre, and should cover most tastes. There is an abundance of detail on their attitudes and motivations, and each has their own colourful demands for petitioning Garou.

The authors draw from the mythology of almost every culture with little pretence of coherence, but with the emphasis on variety, on inspiring creativity rather than restricting it. Although extensive guidelines are given on the nature and role of each spirit, the exact interpretation is left open to the referee and players. Despite the odd quibble – the occasional purple prose and the annoying lack of an index – I recommend this to provide an extra dimension to all *Werewolf* campaigns.

Mark Barter

Score 8/10

Axis Mundi doesn't stand alone and needs the following supplements to make full sense of it (in addition to the main rulebook): *The Player's Guide, Umbra: The Velvet Shadow* and *Caerns: Places of Power*. Start saving.

What About The Mages, Eh?

Although *Axis Mundi* is also marketed for *Mage: The Ascension*, referees for that system will find it far less useful. It is written entirely from a Garou perspective, all the statistics are in *Werewolf* format, and the spirits' attitudes to mages are rarely mentioned. It is useful for those traditions who use shamanistic magic, such as Verbena and Dreamspeakers, as it suggests the knowledge they may learn from spirits, and offers glimpses of some of the spirit worlds they may travel in, but it will require a lot more work to make use of the information.

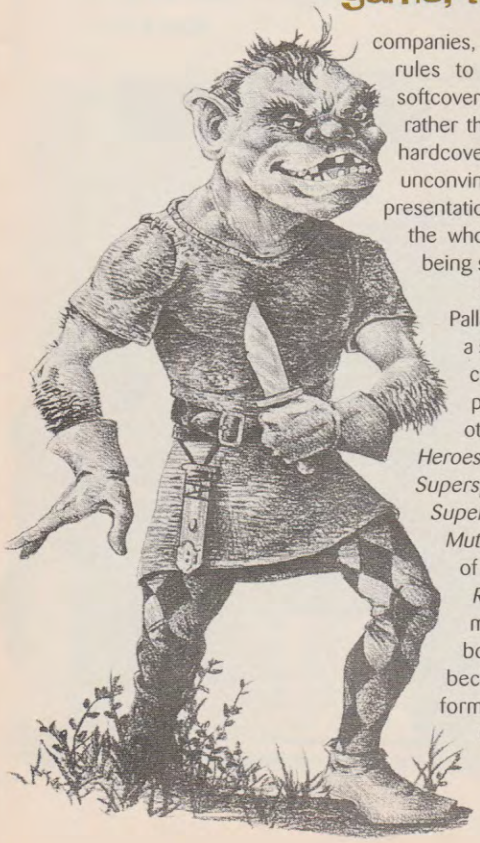
Palladium Fantasy RPG 2nd Edition

A roleplaying game | £14.99 | Palladium Books 001 313 946 2900 | Out now

After 13 years the *palladium fantasy RPG* gets a face-lift.

Originally released in 1983, the *Palladium Fantasy RPG* was the first roleplaying game from Palladium Books. At the time it caused something of a stir among the larger companies, being the first set of rules to be published as a softcover, perfect-bound book, rather than as a boxed set or hardcover. Distributors were unconvinced that this form of presentation would work, and the whole idea was seen as being somewhat chancy.

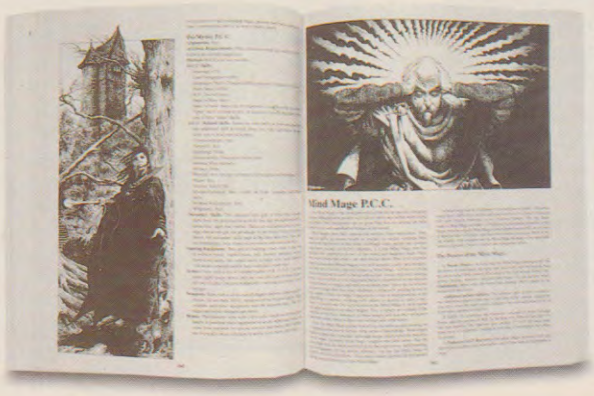
"If you've played and enjoyed some of the other Palladium systems and want a fantasy game, then look no further."



Since then, of course, Palladium has grown into a successful roleplaying company and has produced a host of other games including *Heroes Unlimited, Ninjas & Superspies, Beyond the Supernatural, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and, of course, the ambitious *Rifts*. And, what's more, the perfect-bound softcover has become the standard format for roleplaying rules. Now designer Kevin Siemieda has returned to the game that started it all.

As well as revising and clarifying the original game, this new version of the *Palladium Fantasy RPG* upgrades the system to bring it into line with the other Palladium roleplaying games, making this in many ways 'Rifts Fantasy', and it also includes a great deal more background information about the unique Palladium World that is the setting for the game.

If you have experience with any of the other Palladium games, the rules system itself will be familiar to you. The game is based on the traditional class and level system. Characters are initially defined by eight attributes – Intelligence Quotient (kinda obvious), Mental Endurance (will power and emotional stability), Mental Affinity (charisma and charm), Physical Strength (erm, physical strength), Physical Prowess (agility and dexterity), Physical Beauty (another obvious one), Physical Endurance (fitness and constitution) and Speed (movement rate, as opposed to reaction time). Each of these is rolled with a certain number of six-sided dice, depending on the character's race – humans get the standard 3D6. There are over a dozen other races to choose from, including the usual elves, dwarves and gnomes, as well as a couple that are unique to the Palladium World, such as Wolfen (humanoid wolves), and several that are traditionally seen as baddies, including goblins, orcs and trolls. Particularly high attribute scores result in bonuses to certain actions and abilities, depending on the specific attribute.



So, after the race and attributes have been determined, the player then has to choose the character's Occupational Character Class, or OCC (like the other Palladium games, *Palladium Fantasy* uses many acronyms). There are over 25 of these in the game, split into five main categories –

Clergy, Men of Arms, Optional, Magical and Psychic. As well as Palladins, Rangers, Druids and Wizards, there are several unique classes, such as Diabolists, and even the more familiar types have abilities and quirks that tie them neatly to the Palladium World.

As well as special powers and abilities, the class chosen defines the skills that the character can choose from. Most skills use a percentage system, having a basic value which then increases by a fixed amount with each level gained, although some, such as weapon proficiencies, give the character a cumulative bonus at specific levels, while several physical skills serve to increase the relevant attributes.

Most of the mechanics of the game rely on a simple percentage roll (in the case of skills), or a 20-sided dice roll (for combat). Combat itself is relatively simple at its heart, with D20 rolls to hit, parry or dodge. Armour is rated according to how well it protects the wearer – the better the armour, the more likely that a successful attack will hit it instead of the character. A character's ability to absorb damage is split into two scores: Hit Points and Structural Damage Capacity (SDC). The SDC is reduced first, representing nicks, scratches and other flesh wounds, then Hit Points, which represent serious wounds. SDC is recovered more quickly and easily that Hit Points.

Physically, the *Palladium Fantasy RPG 2nd Edition* weighs in at a hefty 336 pages. Illustration is sparse, but mainly of the same high standard as the company's other books. The writing is clear, with a friendly style that makes for easy reading.

Unfortunately, the structure of the book makes a fairly detailed but not too complex system a lot more intimidating than it should be – a bit more thought about the layout and ordering of the information would have made the whole thing a lot easier to understand. Exceptions to specific rules are mentioned before the rule itself has been explained, and there's a distinct lack of examples.

Overall, this is a fairy good system that's beginning to show its age a little, and its usefulness depends a great deal on the reader. If you've played and enjoyed some of the other Palladium systems and want a fantasy game, then look no further – for this reason it's especially suited to *Rifts* fans. If you haven't come across Palladium games in the past, or are new to roleplaying, the choice is a little tougher. Of its main rivals, *AD&D* is much better supported and *Earthdawn* is a more elegant, modern system. That's not to say that the *Palladium Fantasy RPG* doesn't have things going for it – the sheer amount of information provided here is impressive – but if at all possible it would be a good idea to try playing with a few existing groups to compare the systems and give you a feel for them.

Finally, if you already play the original *Palladium Fantasy RPG*, it's debatable whether you actually *need* this – if you've got any of the other Palladium games, especially *Rifts*, there won't be many surprises in the new rules. In this case you're largely paying for the extra background, the usefulness of which in turn depends on how closely your campaign world matches the Palladium World. On the other hand, if you haven't got any of the other games and your campaign is based firmly in the Palladium World, then there's a great deal of useful stuff here.

Andy Butcher

And the players said...

PAUL: "There are some good ideas, but it's all a bit dated for my taste."

STEVE: "If you like detailed systems which are still playable, this is a pretty good bet."

JAMES: "The background is great – a heady mix of dark fantasy and magic."

EDDIE: "The original was quite innovative for its day, but it hasn't aged well at all."

As well as updating the basic rules, Palladium will be giving all the game's supplements a similar treatment. Second editions of *Old Ones*, *Adventures on the High Seas*, and *Monsters & Animals* will be released over the next few months, along with completely new material for the game. Look out for reviews in future issues of **arcane**.

Score 7/10

Powers of the Mind and Magic

The Palladium Fantasy RPG **details both psionics and several forms of magic. Nearly all characters (depending on race) have a chance to possess psychic powers, and this is determined randomly during character generation, or the player can choose a psychic character class, in which case his or her character is automatically a strong psychic. The various powers on offer are split into several categories, and depending on a character's level of ability and class they can choose a certain number of them. Each power costs a specific number of Inner Strength Points (ISP) to use, and as long as the character has enough ISP remaining (points are regained by rest or meditation) they can use powers as and when they desire.**

Magic is more complicated, being split into several types, with each character class specialising in one or more. Spell magic is the simplest – each spell has a level and a cost in Potential Psychic Energy (yup, you guessed it – PPE). Provided the character knows the spell, it's treated much the same as a psychic power – the character pays the PPE, speaks an invocation and the spell goes off. The other forms of magic work in a similar way, but have different limitations and requirements. Higher level spells can be cast as ritual magic, which means they take longer but are harder to resist. Circle magic relies on creating, activating and using special magic circles. Diabolism is a combination of ritual and spell magic which relies on runes, symbols and power words. Priest magic, unsurprisingly, comes from the power of the Gods, Shaman and Druid magic comes from the forces of nature, and Warlock's Elemental magic is granted by elemental beings bound by the Warlock. Finally, there are two darker forms of magic, Witchcraft and Necromancy, which are both very rare.

Rage: Warriors of the Apocalypse

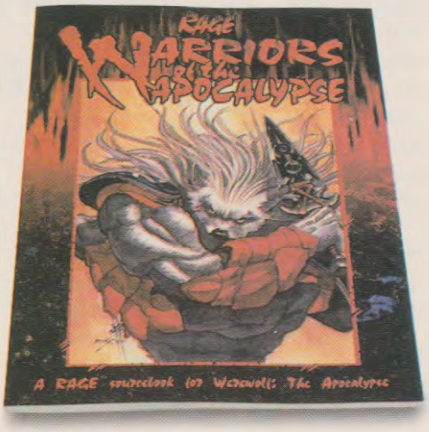
A sourcebook of *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*

£10.99 White Wolf 001 404 292 1819 Out now

You've seen them on the cards, now meet them in the flesh!

This sourcebook contains *Werewolf* statistics and background for nearly all the Garou from the *Rage* collectable card game and for many of the already famous *Werewolf* characters, such as Lord Albrecht. Not all of this material is new and a good chunk of it is reprinted from other supplements with only minor revision.

The characters are listed alphabetically under tribe or race, with two-thirds dedicated to the Garou and their allies, the rest to the Minions of the Wyrm. The format is the same for each character – *Werewolf* game statistics, image (appearance and style), roleplaying notes (how to play the character) and history (life-shaping experiences, motivation and potential destiny).



There is an attempt to present as full a range as possible, with all the tribes, breeds, auspices and even other shapeshifters well represented. The full strata of Garou society is present, from heroes and leaders down to the outcasts.

There is a temptation with such compendiums to treat them as monster manuals, and create an army of killing machines and cannon fodder to throw at players. White Wolf has resisted this temptation and given its characters a lot more heart and soul than most. Pages of statistics become a blur after a while, and it is the personality of an individual that captures the imagination.

The real strength of this book is the range of possibilities that it offers. Not all of the characters are immediate winners, but all have something to offer. Some could be the basis of a story or a whole campaign, others could feature as regular allies or enemies, and some provide local colour. Most have their own agendas which are complex and plausible enough to ensnare the imaginations of storyteller and players alike. The artwork is superb and is often more evocative than the text. But although there are ideas aplenty here, the storyteller will need to flesh them out.

My main reservation about the package is that so much of the material is available elsewhere. However strong these characters may be in isolation, they are far richer set in the context of supplements such as *Rage Across the Amazon*. An index seems essential and is an annoying omission.

The quality of the material deserves a higher rating, but the questionable value for money knocks off a couple of points.

Now I'm off to check on my favourites – a Bone Gnawer hermaphrodite and a Black Spiral dominatrix, which gives you an idea of the kind of campaign I run!

Mark Barter

Score 6/10

Rifts World Book Ten: Juicer Uprising

A *Rifts* supplement

£11.99 Palladium Books

001 313 946 2900 Out now

Juicers are bio-enhanced superhumans. They are incredibly strong and fast, regenerate with frightening speed and have instinctive combat reflexes thanks to surgically implanted biocomputers, nano-machines and chemical enhancements. Unfortunately, Juicers only live for five to seven years after undergoing 'conversion'.

If you get a kick out of playing combat monsters, Juicers are pretty much as good as you can get. Who cares if they only live a few years? Most campaigns don't span that much game time anyway.

Well, this new *Rifts* supplement challenges that point of view, investigating the psychology behind the character class, and portraying them as doomed, tragic heroes. People become Juicers for many reasons – revenge, escape from poverty, a fascination with the lifestyle, or even as unwilling slaves. What they share afterwards is a desire to live life to the full for every precious second that they have left, and a realisation that they are constantly dancing with death.

Juicer Uprising shows just how far some will go to escape their fate, joining necromantic death cults to become immortal, undead Murder Wraiths or desperately following rumours of the life-prolonging 'Prometheus Treatment'. The book concludes with a variety of scenario ideas to involve characters in The Juicer Uprising – a major event in the history of *Rifts'* Earth, as Juicers are enticed to Newtown with promises of the Prometheus Treatment, but turn on the city and take it over when they realise they have been conned. There is a lot of good stuff here for players and referees alike, and if you play *Rifts*, this is a must.

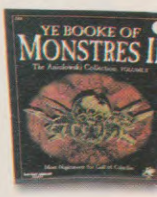
Lucya Szachnowski **Score 8/10**

Ye Booke of Monstres II

A collection of monsters for *Call of Cthulhu*

£7.95 Chaosium

001 510 547 7681 Out now



I'm never too sure of the usefulness of *Call of Cthulhu* bestiaries such as this. *CoC* has never seemed to be a game about *battling* monsters, but rather more an exercise in storytelling,

puzzle-solving and atmosphere. You're better off hearing about monsters than slugging it out with them.

About half of the monsters in this book have been taken from various *CoC* supplements and adventures, and so for the *Cthulhu* nut have little to offer. The others that are new are intriguing but they've been designed with particular stories in mind. There are some excellent scenario suggestions – it's just a shame that you have to prise them out. I would rather have seen a collection of brief scenarios to introduce each monster than the tired old alphabetical Monster Manual format used here.

This is for *Cthulhu* completists only, and even he or she will be disappointed to find that they may have already bought half the material.

Steve Faragher **Score 3/10**

Warcraft II: Beyond the Dark Portal

A new campaign for *Warcraft II* on the PC
£19.99 Zablac/Blizzard Entertainment
01626 332233 Out now

We thought *Warcraft II* was great. The combination of strategy, nifty sound effects, colourful graphics and lots of fun made it one of the best PC games this year. But once you'd finished there wasn't much reason to go back and play it again.

The same cannot be said of this new add-on campaign, *Beyond the Dark Portal*, which details the times after the humans have forced the orc hordes back through the portal which brought them from their dimension. The portal, now destroyed, must be reopened, and the orcs will stop at nothing to make sure this happens.

You can play the orcs or the humans, and complete 12 missions which make up

each race's campaign. This add-on makes playing *both* sides more fun than *Warcraft II* because the plots are radically different for each side. The scenarios are harder than any in the original. New strategies must be employed, and each scenario requires more thought than most of the earlier ones. At £20 this is a bargain which all *Warcraft II* owners should snap up.

Paul Pettengale **Score 8/10**

Into the Badlands

A sourcebook for *Heavy Gear* £8.99 Dream Pod 9
001 514 523 1350 Out now

Take a trip into the great outdoors on the war-torn world of Terra Nova...

Wildernesses have always been great locales for rambling adventurers after fortune and glory. All those majestic yet barren landscapes make a change from the typical urban or arboreal backdrops. *Into the Badlands* provides more in-depth background for *Heavy Gear's* gameworld – the balkanised planet, Terra Nova.

Inspired by Japanese animation's giant robotry, *Heavy Gear* casts PCs as battle-suit piloting warriors on a world of tough politics and border skirmishes. Terra Nova is split into roughly three geopolitical parts: the Confederated Northern City-States, the Allied Southern Territories and the Badlands. This belt of equatorial desert girdles the planet and is home to frontier towns, religious meccas and tenacious sand dwellers.

Like much of the other *Heavy Gear* material, the *Badlands* backstory is very well drawn, and it's presented in a smooth order with historical data followed by political, economic and social facts. There's also a sprinkling of new *Gear* designs, creature files and character archetypes. But, for the most part, *Into the Badlands* is fertile ground for adventuring. In addition to the 11 scenario outlines provided, the book's layout contains much to inspire referees. *Heavy Gear's* rich geopolitical streak is covered in overviews of the Badland's main cities and the influence of the neighbouring Polar powers.

There's also a chapter devoted to Badlanders who exist 'on the fringes', and most interestingly, a section on Terra Nova's religions, most of which are strongly represented in the desert region. The latter is yet another example of the game's detailed universe.

Unlike the rather disappointing *Operation: Jungle Drums* scenario pack, *Into the Badlands* is an excellent resource, and is perhaps an indicator that Dream Pod 9 is better suited to writing background material than adventures. With *Heavy Gear's* on-going story arcing throughout all its product releases, referees might find it easier to create their own path through the game world instead of shoehorning pre-written scenarios into a campaign. Also worthy of mention is the neat icon system used to designate the importance of encountered NPCs. Chessmen indicate their relative rank, with pawns being 'expendables', right up to knights and rooks who are the important folk, and the kings and queens designating historical notables.

There is a pleasing lack of referral to other *Heavy Gear* source material, and it's apparent that a campaign could be run using only this book and the basic rules, something increasingly rare in wide-ranging gameworlds such as this. The layout is clean, and the only gripes are the shifting type size in the text and the infrequency of the maps – plans of all the main cities and some sample townships would have been useful.

Described as something like Earth's Old West, if anything the Badlands seems more like the feuding territories of North Africa, with nation-states jockeying for position on the knife-edge of armed conflict. For *Heavy Gear* players on the lookout for fresh challenges, *Into the Badlands* holds more than enough for a dozen campaigns.

James Swallow

Score 8/10

Uncaged: Faces of Sigil

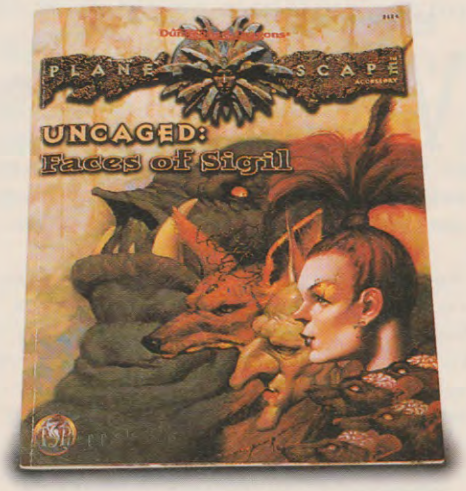
A collection of characters for *AD&D Planescape*

£11.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

Not so much a who's who as a what's what (and why)...

Sigil, The Lady of Pain's citadel, is an elegant gaming construct, yet it can often feel a little hollow. *Uncaged* fleshes out the circular city's streets with a cast of heroes, villains and eccentrics. This isn't just another collection of one-dimensional stereotypes, though. Each and every one of these unique characters is described in such detail that they fight to get off the page and into your game.

Neither do these characters exist in a vacuum. All are subtly intertwined, so that meeting one leads to another, which leads to another, until players are in a world of trouble they didn't deserve but have to deal with. Which is exactly what life in Sigil should be – a swirl of plots, factions and sedition that leaves players' heads spinning, wounds bleeding and experience points tally in overdrive.

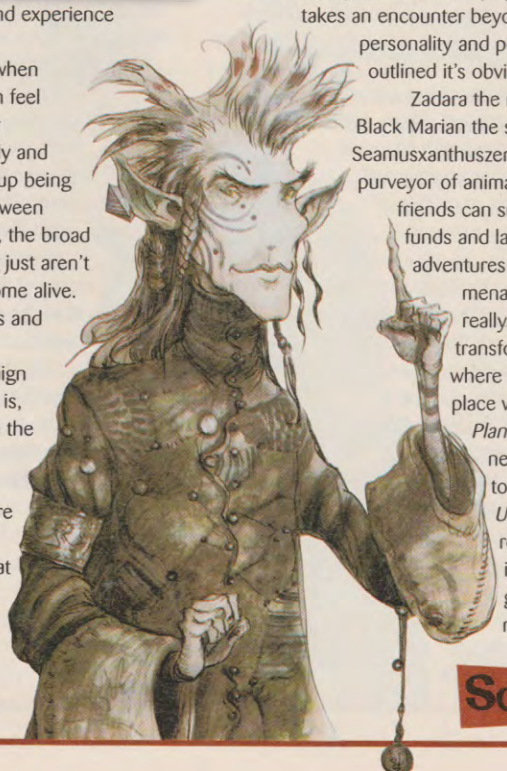


Sigil is splendidly bizarre, but when players first set foot there they often feel isolated by its extreme flavour. Their 'natural *D&D* logic' just doesn't apply and so this brilliantly complex city ends up being used as a stop-off point for R&R between adventures. As with any fantasy city, the broad descriptions in the campaign setting just aren't enough. They need individuals to come alive.

Uncaged delivers 41 characters and 15 quick-sketch NPCs that can be dropped into any *Planescape* campaign quickly and painlessly. Painless, that is, until your players start dabbling with the internecine politics and plots that these individuals bring with them.

Fittingly the stats in *Uncaged* are shuffled to the back of each description, where they belong. What comes first, and what's most important, are the rich descriptions of each 'person'. These run from straight reportage, to interviews through to bombastic self portraits. These make enjoyable reading, as the overall scheme slowly takes shape.

The potential for great roleplaying offered by this book is impressive. Despite its chaotic appearance, information and enthusiasm are neatly balanced, which allows you to learn details about a character's background and history, and get a feel for the way they should be played. So when a player's improvisation takes an encounter beyond the text, the NPC's personality and powers are so well outlined it's obvious how they'll react.



Zadara the money-lending Titan, Black Marian the singing priestess, Seamusxanthuszenus the Mephit purveyor of animal parts and their friends can supply the vital keys, funds and launch-pads for adventures beyond Sigil. This menagerie of the truly odd really flesh out Sigil, transforming it from a place where campaigns start to a place where people live.

Planescape states that you need to find a portal key to get out of the Sigil. *Uncaged* is the key referees need to get into the place and to get at the heart of this most colourful city.

Trenton Webb

Score 9/10

Star Trek: The Next Generation CCG Official Player's Guide

An, erm, player's guide for the *ST:TNG* CCG

£9.99 Brady Games Out now

It's always refreshing to come across a collectible card game player's guide that doesn't consist of little more than a reprint (and revision) of the rules with a card list tacked on the back. What makes this one stand out is that it doesn't even include the rules of the game – the whole book is dedicated to strategy, tactics, discussions of individual cards and other info for players of the *ST:TNG* CCG.

The first thing you notice about the book, though, is not its content but its excellent presentation – glossy full colour throughout, complete with authentic *Star Trek* fonts and pleasing design. It's the best looking CCG player's guide around.

Luckily, all this hasn't been wasted on poor content. The book is split into sections, covering the development of the game (which gives some useful insights into its structure and design), strategies (for deck-building, playing and card combinations), a card-by-card analysis of the 50 most powerful or useful cards in the game (complete with hints on using them), a card list (mercifully brief and to the point), a frequently asked questions list, and several appendices (collectors' information, expansion plans, game variants and sources).

The *ST:TNG* CCG has suffered from several problems since its original release, mainly linked to the card mix (a mistake which Decipher then repeated with the *Star Wars* CCG, see **arcane** 5). This excellent player's guide shows that despite all the difficulties, at its heart the *ST:TNG* CCG is a fine game.

Andy Butcher Score 8/10

Birthright

An expansion for *Spellfire*

12-card Booster Packs £1.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

It was only a matter of time before the latest *AD&D* campaign world was translated into *Spellfire* form. This latest expansion acquaints us with a new effect specific to the *Birthright* system, called 'blood abilities' and new champions with the power to use them in a similar manner to spellcasting or psionics. These champions are depicted with a Golden Crown icon, while the 'blood

ability' powers follow the norm by having a creamy-yellow crown icon. Most *Birthright* champions also have either cleric, mage or both spellcasting abilities, which make them extremely powerful, and also unaffected by the spell-blocking powers of 'Midnight' or 'The Arch Druid'.

Another new introduction are the Awnshegh who, according to the *Birthright* setting, are evil champions, though the *Spellfire* designers seem to have glossed over this alignment simply to include Awnshegh characters into the game. It appears to me that TSR's games designers' collective imagination is beginning to pale with the development of each new *Spellfire* expansion, because effects are beginning to repeat themselves too often. New names and different artwork with the same or similar abilities as already existing cards do nothing to encourage interest.

Overall the *Birthright* expansion is of very little interest to anyone other than card collectors, with only one of the 100 cards immediately springing to mind for possible consideration as an addition to my personal gaming deck.

Chris Baylis **Score 5/10**

Mekton Mecha Manual 2: Terra Files

A supplement for *Mekton Zeta*

£6.99 R Talsorian Games

001 510 549 1373 Out now

The second in a series of *Mekton Zeta* hardware guides, the *Invasion Terra Files* bolt on to the *Mekton Wars 1: Invasion Terra* campaign supplement reviewed back in **arcane** 6. While the latter was mainly a collection of linked wargame scenarios, this book lets referees bring the *Invasion Terra* plotline and gameworld into the roleplaying arena.

Set in the *Mekton Zeta* mould of Japanese animation-inspired giant robots, and based on a future Earth at war with warlike humanoid aliens (shades of *Robotech, Space Cruiser Yamato,* et al), *Mecha Manual 2* carries a little more meat for the campaign universe. Within are all the props a referee needs to run the war, including 11 new mecha and eight new starships (with umpteen variants thereof), character stats for the campaign's 'hero' characters and an extra battle scenario to act as the story arc's grand finale.

Mecha Manual 2 is clearly for use with the campaign supplement, and to be honest, I can't help wondering why the book wasn't released first, or even →

The Risen

A sourcebook for *Wraith: The Oblivion*

£6.99 White Wolf 001 404 292 1819 Out now

They're up, they're about and, come to think of it, they're a lot like *The Crow...*

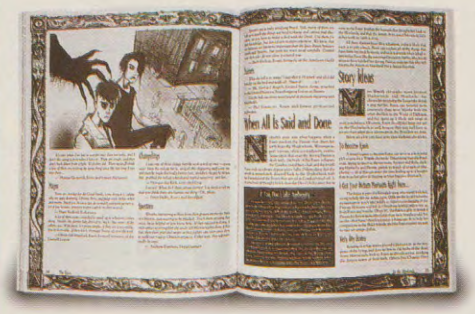
It was only a matter of time before White Wolf had zombies digging their way out of their graves and joining the other denizens of the World of Darkness. Thankfully, these mobile hunks of dead flesh are done rather well.

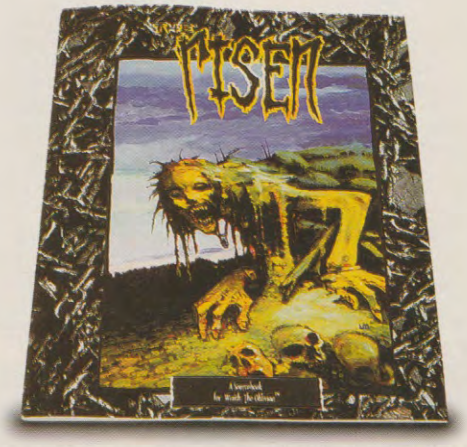
The zombie has already been redefined in popular media by *The Crow,* both the original graphic novel and the film starring Brandon Lee. It is this tragic, driven figure, the revenant of legend, that this supplement aims for, rather than the shambling cannon

fodder so beloved of horror movies. This ties in beautifully to *Wraith,* always a game of emotion and passions. Risen are wraiths who have a passion so strong that it drives them to possess their old bodies and rise to fulfil it.

The system to handle this is neat, simple and intimately tied into the main rules. All that is needed for a wraith to become risen is a few basic skills, the agreement of the wraith's shadow (the dark half of their personality, played by another gamer alongside her own character) and a 'conduit' to house the shadow. This is usually a small object, often one of the wraith's fetters, but it can be a small animal such as a cat, dog, or a crow maybe?

Rules for their abilities once risen are sensible. Nothing short of ripping their bodies apart is going to stop risen, but boy do they have problems eating...





Yes, risen are combat monsters, but the fact that they need to use their Pathos in order to keep going means they can't afford to stray from pursuing their passions, the source of Pathos. And the shadow is much, much stronger once a wraith rises. The idea of their near indestructible body with evil personified in charge is not pleasant for even the most confident of players.

The mix of examples, story, ideas and rules in this book makes for an involving read and the abundant gritty artwork is splendidly evocative.

Imaginative suggestions about how to use risen abound. The one thing the rules make clear is that you won't have player character groups of risen shambling about together. Whether they are used as an unusual player character in *Vampire,* an odd opponent or ally in *Werewolf* or as a blaze of glory exit for an established *Wraith* character, a well used risen will make for dramatic storytelling. In fact, the only thing that has kept me shy of giving full marks is an awareness that this isn't an essential purchase – risen are never going to be at the heart of any on-going *Wraith* chronicle. But I challenge any referee or player not to be inspired by it.

Adam Tinworth

Score 9/10

Shadow Lords: Tribebook

A sourcebook for *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*

£5.99 White Wolf 001 404 292 1819 Out now

They watch and they wait, and the storm gathers...

Each of the Tribebooks for *Werewolf* details a specific tribe of werewolves, and each covers the same areas – the history and culture of the tribe, their reputation and status around the world, their most famous members and game statistics for their unique abilities. Also included are camps and secret societies within the tribe, as well as their attitudes towards the other denizens of the World of Darkness.

The Shadow Lords are the politicians of the Garou world, renowned as diplomats but despised as schemers serving their own agenda. Their name evokes their nature – they plot in the shadows to further their driving will to power. Machiavelli and Neitzsche are the quoted inspirations here. Manipulation is the most treasured attribute, while stealth and subterfuge are the favoured abilities.

The consistency of the package is impressive. The education of a young pup provides a narrative framework, and the way he is taught is as important as what he is taught. We see how the cynical beliefs of the Lords are shaped by a history of betrayal and violence, as the Silver Fangs sell out their inheritance to humanity and the Lords' Eastern European homelands are torn apart by centuries of war. All lessons are painful and only the strong survive.

There is a strong emphasis on style in White Wolf products which often succumbs to pretension. Here the author uses motifs and images to evoke a mood without becoming overbearing. Shadows and darkness hide the secrecy of the Lords, the storm is used to represent their slow building anger, and crows and ravens are the symbols of their covert agents. It's a simple but effective technique which (thankfully) is never overplayed.

The main weakness of the Tribebook format is that it often reinforces stereotypes about the tribes and seems to dictate how tribal PCs must be played. *Shadow Lords* develops a rationale that balances tribal identity with personal freedom – the ends justify the means. The Lords value personal initiative and success as much as tribal loyalty, and encourage dealings with anyone who can further the cause, even agents of the Wyrm. The author explores a number of different roles a Lord can adopt without betraying the tribal creed.

The Tribebooks are intended to flesh out each of the tribes and this one succeeds admirably. The young pup is given a rich sense of their history, as well as their complex motivations and methods. More importantly, this is achieved without denying scope for personal initiative. Recommended for all referees who either have a *Shadow Lord* player in their group, or intend to bring the tribe into their games in some way, and especially for players of *Shadow Lord* characters. Just make sure no-one else gets hold of it, or they may never let you back into the pack ever again!

Mark Barter

Score 8/10

← better, combined with the first release. I suppose this way the roleplayers and the wargamers get to choose what material they need for their game style.

Unlike its predecessor, *Mecha Manual 2* only concentrates on one gameworld, so some of the inevitable redundancy of *Mecha Manual 1* (which featured 10 different backgrounds) is lessened. The *Invasion Terra* hardware is sufficiently similar to enable transfer to other *Mekton* settings such as Algol, Imperial Star, Jovian Chronicles and several others with only minor adjustments. The only glitch of note here is that no provision is made for players to use their own PCs rather than the pre-generated ones supplied. Apart from that, this one's a winner and it makes up for the rather slack content of *Mekton Wars 1: Invasion Terra.*

James Swallow **Score 7/10**

Vampire: The Dark Ages Storytellers Screen

An accessory for *Vampire: The Dark Ages*

£6.99 White Wolf 001 404 292 1819 Out now

With the recent release of *Vampire: The Dark Ages* (reviewed **arcane** 5), it was inevitable that a referee's screen would soon follow – for some reason, game companies seem to feel compelled to produce these things for every new system they release.

This particular screen is the usual four-panel fold-out affair. Physically it's quite attractive, made from fairly sturdy card and featuring four glossy reproductions of John Bolton artwork from the *Vampire: The Dark Ages* rulebook on the 'players' side'. The reverse is taken up with tables and lists for the referee, and covers stuff that you might need to find quickly – given the simplicity of the *Storyteller* system used in *V:TDA,* this is not surprising.

The Vampire: The Dark Ages Storytellers Screen also includes a pad of character sheets printed on coloured 'parchment'. Although not the most original thing to include, they're of more general use than the mini-adventures that are more common these days.

If you're a completist and would rather buy this than spend half an hour with some empty cereal packets and a photocopier making your own, then there's nothing wrong with it. On the other hand, there's nothing here to make it a must-have, or even stand out of the crowd.

Andy Butcher **Score 5/10**

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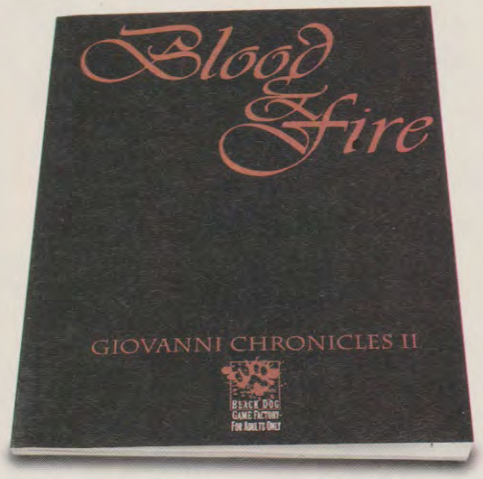
Blood & Fire
Giovanni Chronicles II

An adventure for *Vampire: The Masquerade*

£10.99 White Wolf 001 404 292 1819 Out now

Explore Renaissance Europe in the second part of the epic *vampire* campaign.



One of the most interesting releases for *Vampire: The Masquerade*, *The Last Supper* was an epic adventure that eschewed the more conventional modern setting of the game. Replacing the neon and chrome of today's decaying cities with 15th century Europe, the story cast the players as newly-created vampires who become enmeshed in the deadly plots the Giovanni necromancers and their plans to oust the Cappadocian clan, set against the birth of the Camarilla and the actions of the powerful Founders.

Blood & Fire, although playable as a stand-alone adventure, continues the story. The year is 1666 – two centuries have past – and the players' characters once again become embroiled in the schemes of the Giovanni. Without wanting to give too much away, the players are 'persuaded' by the Founders to retrieve some vital documents for them. In the course of their desperate chase across Europe they get to explore Renaissance Italy, Switzerland and England, encounter some of the most powerful vampires of the time, and find themselves in a wide variety of dangerous, interesting and thought-provoking situations. Oh, and they also get tangled up with the nascent Sabbat.

Considering the detailed history, which is an important part of *Vampire: The Masquerade*, and the immortal nature of the system's protagonists, it's perhaps surprising that so little has been made of the potential offered by historical scenarios for the game. If nothing else, *Blood & Fire* aptly displays one of the key reasons for this lack – running this form of game, especially one that jumps through history, is a real challenge for both players and referees alike. Unless you all happen to be history buffs, running *Blood & Fire* can be a tough prospect, even though the book does its best to help.

As if the difficulties presented by the time period weren't enough, *Blood & Fire* offers plenty more challenges for all but the most experienced groups. This is an epic story with a complex plot, significant ramifications for Kindred society and a strong emphasis on roleplaying over combat. In order for *Blood & Fire* to work, the players will need to appreciate the scope of the events portrayed, and the importance of the impact these events should have on their characters. In the past there's been a tendency for White Wolf to use its 'for adults only' Black Dog Games Factory label as an excuse for unpleasant stuff. Like its predecessor, though, *Blood & Fire* is a book that deserves the 'adult' label, not because of gross content or dubious taste, but because it deals with truly adult material that will require a mature attitude to get the most out of.

Once again, and without wanting to spoil things, players may feel let down by the way it all turns out. Nevertheless, *Blood & Fire* has great potential, especially if the same group has previously played *The Last Supper* and the players reprise their previous roles. Dedicated *Vampire* fans will find it fascinating to experience the turbulent early years of the Camarilla and Sabat, and the radical changes that the organisations cause in Kindred society.

Andy Butcher

Score 7/10

Magic: The Gathering Totally Unauthorized

A player's guide for *Magic: The Gathering*

£11.60 Brady Games Out now

The number of people playing Wizards of the Coast's *Magic: The Gathering* may no longer be tripling every second, but it is still, without any doubt, the most popular collectable card game around. This new player's guide from Brady Games promises to not only increase your understanding of the game, but to improve your play as well.

The book is split into four parts. The first is aimed at newcomers to *Magic* and serves as an introduction to the game, the key concepts behind it and the important terms used. The second part then covers the rules to the game in some depth, including an example game.

The bulk of the book is taken up by the third section, which deals with strategy. Deck construction, card combinations, tactics and much more are included, along with a discussion of several specific cards from *4th Edition*, *Ice Age*, *Chronicles* and *Homelands*. Part four, of course, is taken up by card lists, which at least point out some of the cards to look for (and some of the ones to avoid).

In all, *Magic: The Gathering Totally Unauthorized* is a fairly comprehensive and readable guide to the game. It's refreshingly up to date (although already being to lose its edge with the release of *Alliances*, see page 60). If you're new to *Magic* and don't have a player's guide, this is definitely worth a look. However, if you're a more experienced player, or you have other guides, you should ask yourself just how many books about *Magic* you think you need.

Andy Butcher Score 7/10

Ravenloft: Monstrous Compendium Appendices I & II

A supplement for *AD&D*

£11.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out Now

It's June 1996. You've decided to run a *Ravenloft* campaign. You buy the boxed set, the campaign expansions, the mug, the T-shirt and the cuddly decapitated *Ravenloft* rabbit – you've got all the paraphernalia. Can you start to play? Well yes you could, but you'd have to guesstimate the powers of the *Ravenloft*-

specific beasties, because the first two Monstrous Compendiums have been out of print for years now.

Until recently, the only way to get your hands on a copy of either Appendix was through the **arcane** reader ads. Now, though, those nice TSR bods – who know the value of old rope when they see it – have re-released both Appendices in a single bound volume.

Appendix I details the variants, updates and unique monsters which lurk in the Demiplane's mists. Familiar creatures such as Golems are given new twists, with Bone, Doll, Gargoyle, Glass, Mechanical and Zombie versions. Lycanthropes and the undead are defined in greater depth and offered additional variation, as befits these mainstays of a gothic horror world. The rest of the 68 pages are crammed with *Ravenloft*-specific creatures – Scarecrows, Reavers and Ermordenung – designed to add extra elements of true nastiness to this most horrific gameworld.

Appendix II takes these new creatures and fleshes them out into full NPCs, expanding the descriptions in *Appendix I*. Every creature's hideous history further heightens the atmosphere of terror that stalks the Demiplane, while their adventure ideas suggest how players can meet with them face to face.

As a reference book *Appendix I* does its job well enough. The true worth of the work, though, undoubtedly comes from the quality of *Appendix II's* creations. Abominations such as Ahmi Vanjuko, the ranger imprisoned inside a Mechanical Golem, the serial killing Midnight Slasher, Desmond LaRouche the half-man half-golem, and Athaekeetha the vampiric Mind Flayer offer referees a varied and rich source of legends to drop into their tavern conversations or to add colour to campaigns.

All *Appendices I & II* offer DMs who own the old loose leaf versions are a few new piccies and the tidy new bound form, which is all well and good but hardly enough to justify £12. But for *Ravenloft* DMs who've been struggling on without the compendiums, this re-issue is an essential purchase which offers both core reference material and an inspirational glimpse of the Demiplane's dark heart.

Trenton Webb **Score 8/10**

Lunch Money

A card game

£12.95 Atlas Games 001 612 638 0077 Out now

playground brawls were never like this when I was at school...

With a title like *Lunch Money*, you'd be forgiven for thinking that this new card game from Atlas was about schoolkids – especially because that's how the company originally described it. Somewhere in between the game being started and being released, though, the designers seem to have watched the movie *Se7en*. What began as a fast-moving, easy-to-play card game of fights in the playground has become a fast-moving, easy-to-play card game of fights with some really striking (and pretty disturbing) imagery.

Before going any further, it's worth pointing out that *Lunch Money* isn't a collectible card game – the box contains all 110 cards in the set, which is enough for between two and four players. At the start of a new game the cards are shuffled, and then each player is dealt a hand of five. The object of the game is simply to be the last combatant left standing. Each player begins with 15 'life points', and when all of these are gone he or she is unconscious and out of the fight.

Play proceeds clockwise around the table, with each person taking their turn in order. As a turn you may play a card, discard any number of cards and draw back up to five, or pass. The majority of the cards in the game take the form of attacks, which are played against any other player and cause a specific number of damage points, therefore reducing the target's life. In addition to these there are defensive cards (block, dodge and disarm) and a number of special moves, as well as combinations.

Lunch Money is ridiculously easy to pick up, and remarkably good fun to play – there's something quite satisfying about poking your opponent in the eye, then when another person attacks, playing a block-grab-pimp slap combo back at them. This is just a fun game that's perfect for whiling away 20 minutes or so.

What does make it stand out slightly is the card artwork. All the cards feature tinted black and white photographs of a young girl in a white dress, and many are quite bizarre. Complementing each card are equally strange and unsettling small comments and rhymes in 'typewriter' style – the Choke cards, for example, read 'I'm in MY HappY place. Aren't you?', while the Kick cards read 'Kick You Once. Kick You Twice. Next time I WON't be so nice.'

The imagery is certainly evocative, but it gives a strange, unhinged feel to the proceedings which is almost at odds with the frantic pace of this enjoyable game. You can't help feeling that it would have been better suited to a completely different game.

Still, *Lunch Money* succeeds at what it sets out to do, which is to provide a quick, fun-packed combat game that takes virtually no preparation and can be learnt in five minutes. Even if the artwork is a bit weird.

Andy Butcher

Score 7/10

Legends of Earthdawn, Volume Two: The Book of Exploration

An adventure sourcebook for *Earthdawn*

£5.99 FASA

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Ever since the end of the Scourge, brave heroes of all races and disciplines have travelled across Barsaive, exploring the shattered remains left by the Horrors. In an effort to create a permanent record of their discoveries, King Valarus has commanded the Great Library of Throal to collect the journals, diaries, letters and other accounts of their many exploits, and create the *Book of Exploration*.

As well as providing broke PCs with a little bit of cash every now and then (the Library pays for the material submitted to it), the *Book of Exploration* forms a massive resource for adventurers, offering a vast range of information, maps, clues, descriptions of specific monsters and more.

Legends of Earthdawn, Volume Two contains 20 of these accounts and is intended to be used as a source of inspiration for referees short on ideas. Each account is presented in its original form, which can be photocopied and given to the players. These vary from journal excerpts to letters, some containing detailed information and others giving little more then tantalising hints of great riches or hideous dangers.

The second half of the book then looks at each account in slightly more →

Treasure Tales

A collection of short scenarios for *AD&D*

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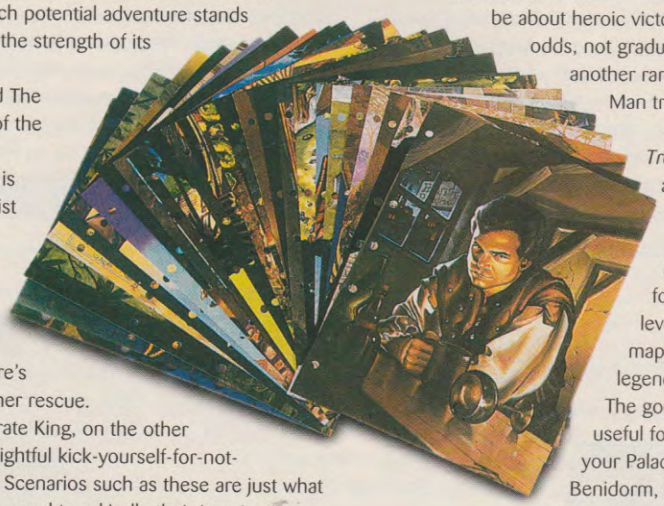
16 instant adventures! But are they pan flair or pot noodle?

You've been running a roleplaying campaign for the past two years and are doing a grand job. The players are having an absolute ball and they are all clamouring for bigger, better adventures. You'd love to accommodate them, but trivia such as careers, spouses, eating and sleeping keep cutting into your design schedule.

Treasure Tales claims to be the answer – 16 pre-packed and pasteurised individual adventurettes. The plan is that referees looking for quick hit adventures, or those looking to bulk out an existing campaign, can grab one of these bare-bones adventures, add a bit of gameworld dressing and serve it up to the delight of their expectant players.

Each adventure is split up between player information, DM's notes, map and scene-setting picture. The player's page introduces the game's setting, its pertinent legends and its characters. The DM's page walks though each map, details the main nasties to look out for and exactly what treasure can be found where. And that's your lot.

As you'd expect for adventures running from the back of one-side of A4, brevity is the order of the day here. Each scenario builds upon a single simple concept, primarily a horde of cash and what the party needs to do to get hold of it. There's no room for cosmetics, so each potential adventure stands or falls solely on the strength of its core idea.



Dragon And The Lady – the best of the 16 adventures – works because it is simply a great twist on the oldest of *D&D* premises. A princess has been kidnapped by a dragon and there's a reward out for her rescue. The Lair of the Pirate King, on the other hand, packs a delightful kick-yourself-for-not-spotting-it secret. Scenarios such as these are just what burnt out referees need to rekindle their imagination. Fast, to the point, and fun to run as well as play.

Yet these are the exceptions. In the Image of Man starts well but lacks precision, offering such helpful guidelines as "after the players have cleared out three or four towns". Implementing it would require just the kind of work that such off-the-shelf packages are supposed to short cut. Other adventures don't even get to the good idea stage, relying simply on the 'go to the dungeon, hack the creatures and nick the cash' format. It's not exactly inspiring.

In fact it's obvious why so many of the hordes in *Treasure Tales* lay peacefully undisturbed – it's not that they are too dangerous to recover, it's just that they're far too dull to bother with. Adventures should be about heroic victory against massive odds, not gradual attrition of yet another randomly placed Lizard Man tribe.

En masse, the *Treasure Tales* are bland and lack subtlety. The best adventures are restricted by their necessarily potent foes, while in the lower levels there are more mapping exercises than legends waiting to happen. The good ones may prove useful for one-nighters while your Paladin's on holiday in Benidorm, but that's about the limit of *Treasure Tales'* appeal.

Trenton Webb

Score 4/10

← detail, offering suggestions for the referee on turning them into fully-fledged adventures for their players. As with the accounts themselves, some of these discussions are very brief, and will require a lot of work from the ref, while others include maps and game statistics for relevant foes and opponents.

In all, *Legends of Earthdawn, Volume Two* suffers from many of the same problems as the original – there are a lot of good ideas here, but even the best of them require work to turn into something useful. If you're completely stumped for inspiration, or need a plot quickly for some reason, then this may be of use. Otherwise, steer clear.

Andy Butcher Score 5/10

The Shapeshifters Manual

A supplement for *Immortal*

£9.95 Precedence Publishing

001 602 894 1832 Out now

One of the less well-known roleplaying games currently available, *Immortal* from Precedence Publishing is a fascinating and involved game of, well, immortal beings hiding behind a facade of humanity, and fighting against the evil influence of the Sanguinary. *The Shapeshifter's Manual* is a combination of sourcebook and supplement which takes a closer look at the immortals and the animal side of their being.

The book is split into four sections. Book 1: A Himsati's Tale is a fictional account that touches on several aspects which are then covered in rule terms in the following sections. Book 2: Himsati Lore begins with a discussion of the nature of Himsati – an immortal's animal form – then looks at each of the important Prides (clans of immortals) in turn, including specific rules and powers for each.

Book 3: Himsati Rules contains the bulk of the game mechanics, dealing with shape-changing, the moon and each of the Himsati Kingdoms (birds, mammals and so on). Book 4: Himsati Powers contains an exhaustive list of new powers, organised by Nature and Talent.

The Shapeshifter's Manual is both attractively designed and packed with information. It has to be said that using this book will add a fair amount of complexity to the game, both in terms of new rules, and new jargon for players and referees to learn. Despite this, it's something of a must for any *Immortal* group, new or old.

Andy Butcher Score 8/10

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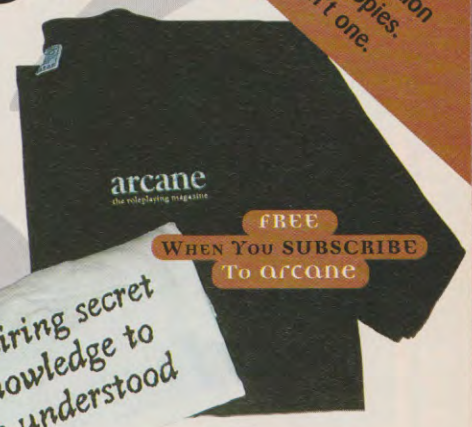

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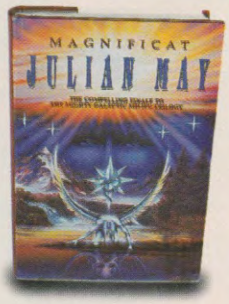


Perhaps I'm biased, but then I would have to be to even stand a chance of effectively reviewing Julian May's conclusion to her *Galactic Milieu* trilogy. You see, to enjoy this 400-plus page tome, you *must* have also read the earlier two books in the series, *and* the 700-plus page prelude novel *Intervention*, oh, *and* the four parts which made up her *Saga of the Exiles* which she started a whopping 15 years ago. This is a complex, dramatic conclusion to a complex, dramatic series of works.

I've loved everything I've read by May (the seven previous books in this protracted series), and I love this equally – the engaging characters and the whole concept of man evolving to a state where we're all able to use staggeringly effective mind powers combine to produce an almost magical experience.

"The mental laser that destroyed her cerebral cortex was surgically precise, avoiding any damage to the cerebellum or brainstem."

This final installment ties together the dozens of loose ends which have been flapping around, gathering momentum since that very first book, *The Many Coloured Land*, in 1981. The Remillard's enemy, Fury, is finally unmasked and put to death, and the grand sequences of the Metaphysic Rebellion are finally played out. The book is unrelenting in its pace, as May hurries to get down everything that the reader wants to see happen, and yet it never becomes overly rushed. Yes, you've got to have read some 3,000-odd pages already to enjoy it, but for those of you who have, you're in for a tremendous treat.

Paul Pettengale Score 9/10

Humility Garden

by Felicity Savage Published by ROC
Paperback £3.50 Out now

I feel bad about criticising this book too harshly. Bad because it demonstrates the sort of effort, all too rarely found in fantasy books, to be genuinely original. Bad because there is an obvious intelligence in Felicity Savage's work which is trying to use the fantasy form as an allegory of modern times.

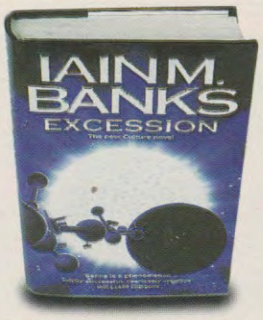
"'The ghostiers would use the information to persuade the Ellipse that Erene is not fit to hold the twentieth seat,' Humi said simply."

Bad because I think that this is the sort of book that we would all be fairly proud of as a first novel.

Unfortunately, *Humility Garden* never quite captures the imagination in the way it should. It is a rites of passage novel – the unfinished biography of the main character, the strangely named Humility Garden of the title. But Humility is not a particularly easy character to identify with. She seems at times compassionate and vulnerable and at other times hard and cruel, but without explanation as to why these changes should occur. I never once felt the slightest tinge of interest in what might happen to her next. Her story is strangely devoid of anxiety or pleasure.

Excession

by Iain M Banks Published by Orbit
Hardback £15.99 Out now



Excession is the latest in Banks' brilliant series of Culture novels. In this galaxy, the Culture – a society of worlds nursed by the Minds (super-Artificial Intelligences) – reached an advanced state of Utopia even before the humans of Earth started throwing rocks at each other. Other 'Elder' civilisations had already got to a stage where they were developed enough to opt out of the mundane, physical universe. One day, this 'sublimation' would happen to the Culture, too. In the meantime, the Minds are content to play the galactic civilisation game and keep their own society in safe, ordered happiness.

"Within the infinites raised to the power of infinites that those mathematical rules provided, the Minds build their pleasure domes of rhapsodic philosophical joy."

Many of the Culture's citizens we meet in the novels are not satisfied, however. Though they may live forever, experience any pleasure, have a new body, and sleep for a thousand years looked after by the Minds, still they yearn for something more. This is the situation when the Minds discover an entity – an entity which could either destroy the Culture, loosen its grip on the development game, or transcend it from its stasis.

Huge in scope, intricate in detail, swaying from pathos to metaphysics and from humour to light-speed action, *Excession* is another astounding achievement from Iain Banks – a science-fiction writer truly without equal at the moment.

Gideon Kibblewhite

Score 10/10

It is also let down by the author's lack of attention to detail. Little things that might help make the reader believe in the fantasy world portrayed are glossed over, while the main action proceeds at an oftentimes bewildering pace.

There is a lot to this book: an outline of a fascinating world, a lot of thoughtfulness and a desire to tackle large topics. Sadly, there is almost no enjoyment to complement that.

Steve Faragher Score 4/10

The Earth Strikes Back

Edited by Richard T Chizmar Published by White Wolf
Paperback £4.50 Out now

Without a doubt the best anthology of short stories to be published in a long time, and probably the best horror collection I've ever read, *The Earth Strikes Back* is a compilation of 20 specially written tales of ecological terror from authors including Dan Simmons, Richard Laymon, Poppy Z Brite, Ed Gorman, Rick Hautala and more, edited by the World Fantasy Award-winner Richard T Chizmar.

White Wolf has a history of being a fairly 'green' company, sponsoring a pack of wolves, crusading environmental issues in the late *White Wolf* magazine and so on, but it's really outdone itself here. Between them these stories shock, scare and frighten you, not with mythical creatures or senseless gore, but with the damage we've done and continue to do to the world in which we live.

"Black liquid gushed from the dark hose and flowed into the garbage-strewn gutters."

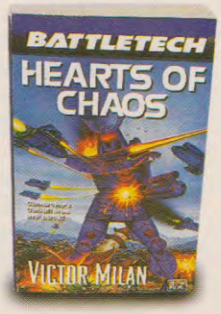
From the chilling 'diary' of Dan Simmons' *My Copsa Micas* – my personal favourite – in which the author's thoughts and experiences paint a dark and hopeless picture of our world's health, to the stark, brutal vision of Mark Rainey's five-and-a-half page *Torrent*, these stories are bleak and unsettling.

More often than not, fiction that tries to be important simply falls into the trap of being patronising and pretentious. Here, though, by concentrating on their stories the authors have avoided this common problem, and the result is a stunning book. Because of White Wolf's decision to make it non-strippable (meaning that instead of simply stripping off the covers of unsold copies and returning them, the whole book must be returned so that it can be resold or recycled), it may be hard to find. But it's well worth the effort to track down, and very highly recommended, both as an inspiration for horror referees interested in ecological dangers, and as a superb work in its own right.

Andy Butcher Score 9/10

Battletech: Hearts of Chaos

by Victor Milán Published by ROC
Paperback £3.50 Out now



Milán's second book after *Close Quarters* brings back Camacho's Caballeros, his Tex-Mex mercenary team in the pay of Chandrasekar Kurita. *Hearts of Chaos* takes the crew to the frontier world of Towne to back up the locals against a threatened invasion by the Black Dragon yakuza clan. Mix in a bunch of angry natives and a few militia squads and the stage is set for big trouble.

Despite being a Battletech book, *Hearts of Chaos'* heroine is anything but a Mech pilot; tough but vulnerable scout Cassie Suthorn's trademark is her dislike of the giant machines and her singular skill in killing them hand-to-hand.

Leading in from this non-exclusive focus, the novel spreads the narrative around to cover characters aside from Mechwarriors – assault troopers and aerospace pilots also get a look-in. As you might well expect, the yakuza invasion comes in spades and the story shifts as the Caballeros go from defenders to guerrilla

"On the other hand, what she had in mind to do was mad even by the standards of somebody who would jump half-naked out of a fifth-storey window to attack an 85-ton Battlemech with a dagger."

warriors. The battle links here are up close and personal, and there's very little Inner Sphere-spanning interstellar intrigue to be found. The plot's linear, with few surprises, and by and large the characters are off-the-peg archetypes.

Lean Times in Lankhmar

by Fritz Leiber Published by White Wolf
Hardback £15.99 Out now

Fafhrd and The Gray Mouser, two of fantasy literature's greatest, yet most unlikely heroes, first appeared in *Adept's Gambit* (1936) in the story of their quest to rid themselves of a curse that had rendered them womanless (except for Chloe the cross-eyed Greek, who didn't count). This story is re-printed here and is indicative of the tone of the other tales in this, White Wolf's second volume of some of the best dark fantasy ever written.

Leiber was too modest to write enormous novels, but he wrote sword-and-sorcery with the discipline of fine poetry and the descriptive powers of the best. The subject matter, however, is base desire and the lust for adventure. Fafhrd and The Mouser are out for larks – if they do good, it's as much as a by-product of their cavorting and carousing as from any

"'Don't go away, Fafhrd. But what is down there?'
'Everything!' the answer came back, not quite so faint this time.
'Are there girls?' the Mouser queried.
'A whole world!'"

yearning to make Lankhmar a better place. Life in the city is tough enough as it is without worrying about the eternal struggle between good and evil. This attitude makes the northern barbarian and his wily companion more human and believable than most fantasy characters and, in turn, involves the reader further in their fate.

These stories have been very influential on late 20th century fantasy writing and the development of roleplaying. It is what happens in the land of Newhon (and places beyond) that makes fantasy fun, and makes people think that fantasy gaming might be fun, too. White Wolf's posthumous publication of the 'Grand Old Man' can only be faulted by bemoaning the stories that aren't included, such as *The Bleak Shore* and *The Sadness of the Executioner*. Where's volume one? Where's volume three?

Jonathan Palmer

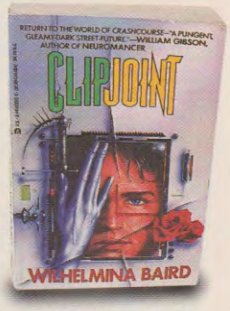
Score 8/10

Nevertheless, *Hearts of Chaos* makes a good read and the battle sequences are swift and dynamic. *Battletech* novels seem to fall into two camps for the most part – Political Power Drama or Military Action Adventure – and *Hearts of Chaos* nestles neatly in the latter, with a focus on one world, one battle and one concern: revenge. The book also forms the basis for Milán's next *Battletech* work, *Black Dragon*, of which a teaser chapter is excerpted after the epilogue.

Jim Swallow **Score 8/10**

Clipjoint

by Wilhelmina Baird **Published by Ace**
Paperback £3.50 **Out now**


RETURN TO THE WORLD OF CRASHCOURSE—"A PLUNGENT, GLEAM DARK STREET-FUTURE."—WILLIAM GIBSON, AUTHOR OF NEUROMANCER
CLIPJOINT
WILHELMINA BAIRD

Following straight on from where her first book, *Crashcourse*, left off, *Clipjoint* is a slick, hard-edged tale of a dark, cyberpunk future. Told almost exclusively from the street-thief-made-good heroine's point of view, this is a tale full of mega-corps, arch-villains, anti-heroes and cyberware.

Where Wilhelmina Baird excels is in her characterisation. Witness then Cass, the aforementioned heroine, whose greatest asset is that she's always worrying, so she gets into a lot less trouble than the men in her life (she's already imagined the worst that can happen before it does). She's not beautiful, but she is sexy. She's not sophisticated, but she is smart. Mostly she's believable.

"Sword's warm velvet voice can sound like something you get on the late late show and leaves you coaxing the children down from the curtains."

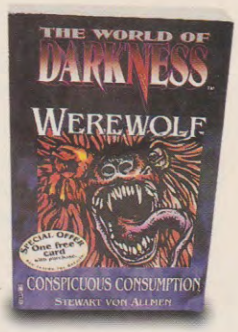
Wilhelmina also has an excellent sub-Raymond Chandler-style which zings the book along at a cracking pace. She's particularly good at relating action sequences, almost leaving the taste of adrenaline in the reader's mouth.

Where she doesn't succeed so well is in innovation; although some of the uses to which it's put are new, there is no technology in this book that hasn't appeared somewhere else before. She relies far too much on heavy-handed deus ex-machinas to rescue the storyline. Nonetheless, this is a very enjoyable book, fully in the un-put-downable frame. The first one's even better.

Steve Faragher **Score 7/10**

Werewolf: Conspicuous Consumption

by Stewart von Allmen **Published by Boxtree**
Paperback £5.99 **Out now**



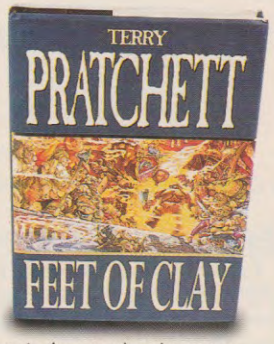
A young, inexperienced group of Garou (werewolves) has been brought together by two Stargazers' elders and formed into a pack, defending a small cairn near the Midwestern town of Little River.

"The wind still beckons my body and soul and I shall ride it until you are redeemed or dead."

Unbeknown to Tuck, Passer, Tom, Ally and Verse, though, they are but a small part of a far larger plan. Their mentors have dedicated themselves to saving one of the greatest Garou champions, who has slipped into Harano – a mental and spiritual prison from which few Garou ever escape. When the Wyrm comes to Little River looking for the defenceless champion, only the young pack can defend both him and their new home from its pervasive evil.

Feet of Clay

by Terry Pratchett **Published by Gollancz**
Hardback £15.99 **Out now**



Joy of joys, yet another long-awaited novel – this time, yet another *Discworld* offering from Terry Pratchett. Such is the man's charm, wit and genius, that regular fans are sure not to be disappointed, and even those of us who feel that a man of his talents could try to do something different for a change, cannot begrudge the fact that this is a real treat from beginning to end.

One of the most clever things about this novel, and the rest of the *Discworld* series, is the way the characters speak in common, vernacular, modern English in such a bizarre and fantastic setting. You are less likely to hear 'Hail' or 'well met' than 'all right, mate' in *Discworld*. The overall effect of this is to make his creation seem more real and surreal at the same time.

"It had all been a long time ago. It didn't matter what a bunch of deranged romantics thought. Facts were facts."

The same goes for the plot of *Feet of Clay*. Here we have a modern murder mystery set in *Discworld*. The intrepid leader of the investigation is the wonderful Vimes, a cool but socially inept officer in charge of a corps of incompetents and a growing number of corpses. The laughs come not just from the author's wry narrative and comment, but from witty characters who somehow seem out of place in a world that is carried on the back of a turtle (of unknown sex).

I won't give any story away – it unwinds agreeably of its own accord – just read it. It's another gem from a master of comic fantasy.

Gideon Kibblewhite

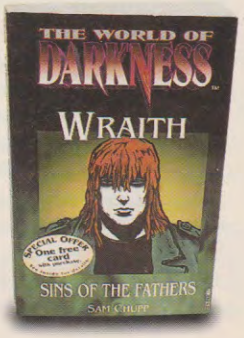
Score 9/10

Conspicuous Consumption is a well-written book which will be of interest to any *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* player or referee. However, there are too many problems to give it a more general appeal. The story takes a long time to get going, and the two climactic events occur too soon after each other. The book also tries to demonstrate the many levels at which the Wyrm operates in the world of *Werewolf*, but because of this the most exciting part of the resolution comes first, leaving the finale feeling like something of a let-down. It's not that *Conspicuous Consumption* is a bad book – it's just not a great one.

Andy Butcher **Score 5/10**

Wraith: Sins of the Fathers

Sam Chupp **Published by Boxtree**
Paperback £5.99 **Out now**



Of all White Wolf's *World of Darkness* roleplaying games, *Wraith: Sins of the Fathers* is perhaps the most bizarre, and undoubtedly the toughest of the collection to play effectively. Eco-terrorist werewolves and angst-ridden vampires aren't particularly difficult to get your head around, mages are pretty straightforward to deal with as

long as you don't run a mile at the thought of the odd philosophical debate, and changelings whimsical natures are all right (we've all been children, after all). On the other hand, being dead is definitely something that can be extremely difficult to get a grip on.

Although it only does a moderate job as a novel, *Sins of the Fathers* does a much better one of giving an insight into the Shadowlands and their unique challenges – or one view of them, at least. The story revolves around Kirk, a small-minded drugs dealer killed in a gang hit, who learns to come to terms with himself and his feelings for others while fighting against an ancient curse on his family, his dead father and his Shadow (who, interestingly, takes the form of a twisted version of his father).

"Then, somehow, Cindi knew that he was there. Somehow, he was there, listening to her."

Unfortunately, as a stand-alone novel, *Sins of the Fathers* doesn't work particularly well, mainly because it doesn't bother to explain a great deal of the setting – you kind of have to already know about the structure of the Shadowlands, Wraiths and their special powers in order to understand exactly what's going on. If you do understand all this stuff, though, it presents an extremely useful insight into the way that certain Wraiths perceive and explain these things themselves.

Andy Butcher Score 6/10

The Books of Magic: Summonings

by John Ney Reiber et al Published by Titan
Graphic novel £11.99 Out now

The chronicles of trainee magician Timothy Hunter began with Neil Gaiman's original *Books of Magic* and was later continued in John Ney Reiber's *Bindings*. Reiber also brings us the third installment, which is entitled *Summonings*. This fabulous collection encompasses five stories, each of them carefully interwoven with all the necessary ingredients of fantasy worlds and alternate realities.

Catapulting us first to the year 2012, the future Tim Hunter sees his current existence threatened by his confused adolescent self of 1994. So begins the attempt to corrupt young Timothy. The future Tim must ensure that his younger counterpart chooses a path of evil in order to further his ambitions in mastering magic, and so become his evil and sinister future self. Tim's development is fraught with all kinds of mortal dangers and he finds the

"Don't you start. Listen, I've worked magic once in my life, and that was just convincing some snow to leave an old bag guy alone."

responsibility of magic difficult. The decisions he has to make now are shaping the future, and having witnessed the possibilities it's hard to take control and make the right choices. Reiber captures the confusing and sometimes lonely passage from childhood to adulthood admirably.

The collection is beautifully written and the illustration is every bit as impressive. Reiber's talent lies in crafting exciting and fast-moving plots interspersed with revelations which more than keep your interest piqued throughout. The second story in the collection, entitled Sacrifices, won the Eisner award for its storyline.

Although this is the third installment of the series, it's thankfully not essential to have already read the rest of the collection. Fortunately for those without masses of time on their hands, this graphic novel stands alone as a more than enjoyable read and comes highly recommended.

Maryanne Booth Score 9/10

"I think that Microsoft is afraid of us."

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arcane scribblings

Some sleeping dogs just don't have a chance of being left to lie, as you've been proving with the volume of letters about... religion and roleplaying.

Dear arcane,
Your article 'Dicing with the Devil' (**arcane** 6) was most excellent – full marks for showing the ridiculous attitude of the fundamentalist right, who plainly know nothing about the games we play. It was also a great

"My players have been Christian and atheist"

idea to print an article by a rational Christian. Andrew Rilstone showed clearly to all of those 'unawares' that some gaming is offensive to Christians. Rest assured that a nod of approval is butted firmly in the direction of Bath.

I am a Christian myself and have refereed roleplaying games for years. My players have been Christian, atheist, Catholic and Jimmist – never have I played with a Satanist. What a surprise, eh?

Rob Barrett, Leamington Spa

No surprise at all. I've never played in a gaming group with any Satanists either, and I don't know anyone who has. However, not everybody thought that the religion and roleplaying feature was as good as you did...

Dear arcane,
Much as I have enjoyed your magazine up to now, I was far from impressed by the article about religion in issue 5. Andrew Rilstone had written an excellent piece on what not to say in an attempt to avoid an agonising opposition to roleplaying, while being frank about gaming's inherent occultist content. Then we get Gavin Baddeley wading in like a berserker, presenting any parent of a prospective newcomer to the hobby with enough fuel to burn a truck-load of games, supplements and scenarios. Not only is the visual impact of the feature offensive (I mean, a burning cross – are you mad?), but he sets out to make any seasoned roleplayer assume the view that anyone who makes any criticism of roleplaying on religious grounds is quite obviously a fanatic and deserves to be subject to a witch hunt. Please, don't roleplay with your eyes shut.

Mike Hardwick, subscriber

Yes, we've had a number of letters questioning our choice of cover (and feature) illustration for **arcane** *5. I personally don't have a problem with it, and yes, I am a Christian. As for Gavin's feature setting out to corrupt the minds of our readers. Nosiree – you're wrong there, and besides, I like to think that the readers of* **arcane** *have got minds of their own, and that they're not going to let anyone, 'make them assume the view' held by any other individual.*

Dear arcane,
Once again, the religion verses roleplaying debate gets an airing. No doubt we'll be seeing letters preaching understanding and respect, or indignation at the blatant 'lies' spouted by the religious types to all who will listen.

We rise up in defence of our hobby! We proclaim loudly that it is

"We rise up in defence of our hobby!"

fantasy, that the monsters are not real, and that it's naught but make-believe! Of course, we're doomed to fail – how can you defend your hobby against people who feel from the very depths of their souls that roleplayers are Satan's avatars?

James Morton, Germiston

Yes, it's difficult, but does that mean we should lie down and let them walk all over us? I think not.

Dear arcane,
Gavin Baddeley's article contained more research into the subject than I've ever read in similar features. You must accept that it was a case of preaching to the converted, because we, as gamers, do not believe that our hobby is founded in Satanism.

I do have complaints, however, with regard to Andrew Rilstone's column. While I agree that many of the defences made for roleplaying against the fundamentalist views are just as 'blinkered and extreme', Andrew should bear in mind that everyone is not as articulate as he when it comes to expressing their views. Often it's a case of using sweeping generalisations to get your point across.

Where I have real problems with Andrew's column is with the four points he makes towards the end of his piece...

1. All Christians hate roleplayers.

I agree that this is a gross generalisation which no one should use as means of defence. However...

2. Only fanatics and extremists criticise games.

Rubbish. Other people criticise the games too, and everyone is entitled to their opinion. As far as the General Synod of the Church of England's view of *D&D*'s basic premises as being 'an un-Christian view of the world', I don't think it matters what its opinion is. Personally speaking, why should *D&D* conform to Christian teaching? It's up to the individual to make the choice as to what is suitable in his or her eyes.

3. Roleplaying games contain nothing to offend Christians.

Surely, if you don't agree with something, you simply don't buy or play it. If someone has different beliefs to you, and doesn't have a problem with a game's material, then he or she should be allowed to go ahead and play it. Who are you to stop them? However, I find it

communication

If you'd like to get in touch with **arcane** *there are several ways. The most traditional is to send us a letter clearly marked '***arcane** *scribblings' and addressed to* **arcane**, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW. *The slightly more technically advanced can send us a* fax on (01225) 465982, *while all you fully-fledged InfoCyberOtakuNauts out there can e-mail us at:*
arcane@futurenet.co.uk *or visit our Web site on:*
http://www.futurenet.co.uk/entertainment/arcane.html.
We look forward to hearing from you.

No to death!

Letter Of The MONTH

Dear arcane,

If you are a capable referee, and if your players are in any way imaginative, there should be no reason to kill them off on a regular basis as Paul Pettengale stated in his feature, 'Live and Let Die', in **arcane** 6.

Players should develop a connection with their characters and a concern for their well-being. If this happens then a serious wounding becomes just as much of a nightmare as sudden and final death.

Players should not be at all nonchalant about the characters they create – they should take danger on board and not just brush it off in the knowledge that if a character dies they can simply roll a new one.

Colin R Sinclair, no address given

Obviously, it's going to be pretty difficult for me to agree with you on this point, given that I wrote the feature in **arcane** *6 that you're referring to. However I do see your point. But consider this: if your players have never experienced character death, how can they really fear for their characters' lives?*

extremely difficult to believe that games designers are deliberately going out of their way to offend anyone, especially Christians.

4. There is occult content in roleplaying games.

Of course there is, and no, I don't have a problem with that. To quote Mr Rilstone, "It's a free country," so let us gamers do what we want. If a game purports different beliefs to the norm, that doesn't make playing it wrong.

Liam Kelly, Saltash

Odd, you say that Andrew Rilstone's column in **arcane** *5 fuelled your anger, and yet, ultimately, you seem to be agreeing with what he had to say. Still, that's enough for this month on that topic – onwards to others!*

Dear arcane,

It was nice to see the review of the *CORPS Dreamtime* supplement in **arcane** 6. Steve Jackson Games first tried this novel approach to roleplaying back in 1989 with *GURPS Ice Age*, released in the wake of the popular *Clan of the Cave Bear* novels. The book provided a wealth of background for neanderthal and Cro-Magnon characters, the prehistoric setting unique at the time. It still reads in places like just another fantasy supplement, and was often vague in defining its potential, yet it remains one of the most inspiring roleplaying books I've come across. Gaming in this pre-technological world was challenge enough, but even a cursory read demanded that the 'two fights, a monster and a magic ring' approach so common in games be abolished.

Characters were forced to totally re-think their place in their world, as traditional motivations for gameplay vanished. Brave players could venture further down the evolutionary ladder to try out pre-hominid species such as the Australopithecines – without language, tool-making or fire.

"Characters were forced to rethink their place"

Roleplaying animals! Was this actually possible? If gaming had an avant-garde, then this was it. Such a minimalist approach gets straight to the essence of character roleplay, and for me captures the true pleasures of gaming. Compare this with the pretentious angst of *Vampire* – also concerned (at least superficially) with exploring the character's motivations and inner self.

GURPS Ice Age went out of print pretty quickly – such experiments don't appear to be commercially successful. Still, I'd like to think that such thoughtful innovations like those it encouraged eventually filter into the mainstream, and help to change gaming for the better. Viva *Dreamtime*!

Paul Clammer, e-mail

For me, the best game I've come across which presented you with the opportunity to play animals was →

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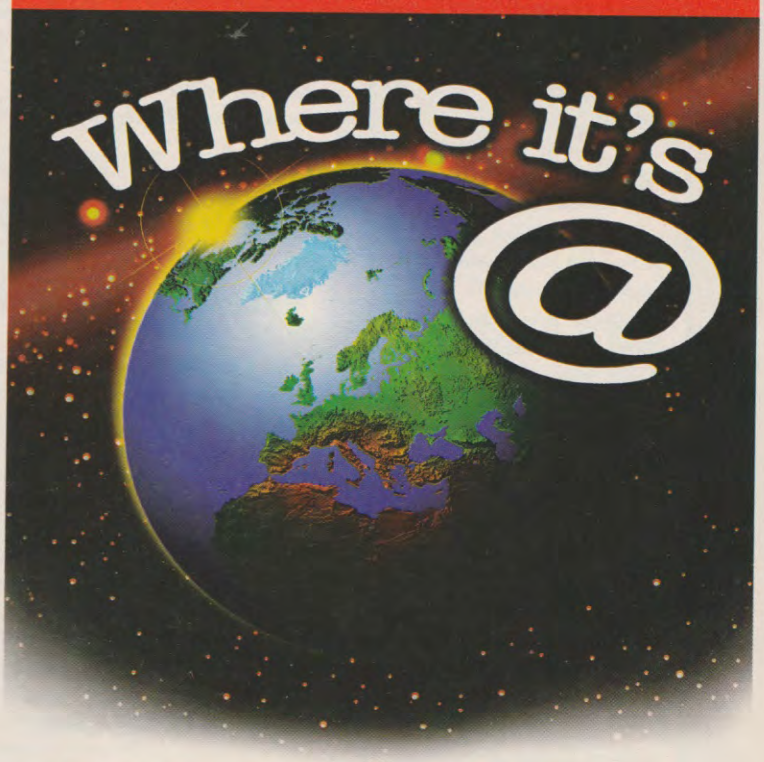

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arcane shorts

Snippets from all those letters which missed making it into the main columns...

Well, frankly I don't know what I'm more shocked by – the cover of **arcane** 6 or the letter from the improbably-named Danton Pergon in which he offered to take me out for a meal.

Anne G Drop

Yep, please, this is supposed to be a letters page, not a dating agency!

Love them or hate them, CCGs are NOT roleplaying games, and therefore have no place in a magazine which says on its cover that it is, "the roleplaying magazine".

Name withheld

Sorry, love them or hate them, CCGs are now a part of our hobby, and **arcane** *will continue to cover them, albeit in the minimalist way we do now.*

Your Encounter section is great as it is – you'd be fools to dabble with stats.

Rob Barrett

Glad you think so, and as far as we're concerned, stats are definitely out!

You seem to print a lot of articles which are aimed at people who are very stupid. If they really can't come up with these sorts of things themselves, then they should stick to playing Scrabble and collecting those coloured card things.

Colin R Sinclair

Do you not think you're being a tad harsh? Oh well, you can't please everyone...

All girl gamers! Get out there and show the lads how to do it!

Helen Flynn and her pal

← Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Other Strangeness, *but I don't think that could be described as roleplaying avant-garde!*

Dear arcane,

I have nothing against roleplaying games, CCG's and the like in principle. I play them myself. But is it

> "Go out and get pissed – right now!"

really a good sign if you spend your entire day writing and thinking about them? If I were you, I would go out and get pissed right now, and don't talk about RPGs. Think you could manage that?

Jeremy Chaloner, e-mail

Great idea in principle (and it is Andy's birthday today), but it's only 10am, so the pubs aren't open yet. Oh well, another hour of typing in letters to suffer, then we'll go down the pub (to play NetRunner*).*

Dear arcane,

Never in the history of roleplaying magazines has there been so much blank space on so many of the pages! For a magazine of almost 100 pages there's an awful lot of big illustrations, spaced-out text, white borders and huge titles going on. **arcane** seems to be operating like the TARDIS in reverse; there's just not enough in it!

Pam A Needum, Coventry

The design of the mag is something we care deeply about, and something which we put huge amounts of effort into getting right. I feel that the illustrations we include in the pages of **arcane**, *especially those which complement our features, are essential in getting our ideas across. A picture can, as it has been said, say a thousand words, after all.*

However, you'll be glad to know that, in an effort to fit even more words into each issue of **arcane**, *we've dropped our point-size, which means the letters are slightly smaller. Even though it's almost unnoticeable to the eye, that makes a huge difference to the word-count.*

Dear arcane,

After reading **arcane** 6 I felt compelled to write to you to tell you of an incident whereby we were banned from playing *D&D* and other roleplaying games at our school.

For about three years myself and some friends had been running a wargaming club, with backing from the school. The school happily coughed-up for copies of *Blood Bowl* and *Advanced HeroQuest*, and we ran some *AD&D* mini-campaigns. After a bust-up in the group a friend and I went to the headmaster to ask if we could set up a dedicated *D&D* club, and to our shock he told us we couldn't – other schools, he had been told, had banned *D&D* and he had decided to follow suit.

I feel that the problem arises from a misunderstanding of what our hobby entails. People think that our games are either 'just for children', or

> "Other schools had banned *D&D*"

they think the games corrupt children in some way – we just can't win! There's a degree of embarrassment involved, so around school people hide the fact that they are roleplayers. And that doesn't do the hobby as a whole any good at all.

Steve Nicoll, Forres

It's a shame when anyone feels ashamed of something they enjoy (providing it's legal, of course), and when it leads to misunderstandings, it's doubly so. Still, I think it's short-sighted of your headmaster to ban D&D, *simply because other schools had done so. Would he start caning children because the school down the road did? No, didn't think so.*

Dear arcane,

Thank God your publishing people are not narrow-minded, middle-aged, fat, bearded communists and you are not condemning Games Workshop, who, although taking the piss with their prices, introduce an awful lot of people into the gaming hobby.

Lee Thompson, London SE18

You're right. Our publisher is neither bearded nor a communist. Oh Christ, looks like it's the dole for me – didn't mean it Simon, honest!

Dear arcane,

I am interested in researching the history and origins of live action roleplaying in this country, from as far back as Peckforton Castle to the present day.

I am looking for information such as dates, names, clubs, sites, gaming worlds and rules systems. If anyone has taken part in, or has run a LARP session, please contact me.

Alex Hall, 12 Angerstein Road, Scunthorpe DN17 2LZ

Oh dear. If I were you Alex, I'd prepare to be deluged!

Dear arcane,

In an article on *GURPS Discworld* in **arcane** 6 you wrote that *Light Fantastic* was the first Discworld book. I beg to disagree, for I was led to believe that *Colour of Magic* was the first (because it says so on the front cover!).

The happy sunflower, e-mail

Whoops, we made a mistake there (though they were published very, very close together, weren't they?) Sorry about that – it won't happen again. Promise.

Dear arcane,

Lee Brimmicombe-Wood's Do It Yourself series looks like it's to become the best run of features yet, though the first installment doesn't really tell me anything I don't already know. I develop games as a hobby these days, instead of running them, and I am relishing the prospect of some new ideas.

The happy sunflower, e-mail

I'm looking forward to seeing Lee's series develop too, and I think you'll agree that last month's part, and indeed this issue's installment, are that much more involved.

arcane On-Line

Devil worship or imaginative fun? The religion and roleplaying debate has fuelled a fierce exchange of values on FutureNet. Karen Levell gets caught in the crossfire.

Hello and welcome!

Wouldn't it be great if you could pop into **arcane's** office whenever you felt like it? You know, talk to the team about all the latest releases, swap playing tips and gossip, and find out about all the best conventions going on this weekend. Even better, imagine if there was a 24-hour party every day, with all of **arcane's** readers in attendance. You could recruit some new players for your club, find those elusive supplements and debate the state of modern roleplaying with like-minded people.

Well, the dream may be closer than you think. Okay, we can't fit you all into **arcane's** office (and the editor might have something to say about a 24-hour party, come to think of it, although he'd probably get used to the idea), but there's more than enough room on our World Wide Web site. Last month over 2,000 people popped in to have a chat with their fellow roleplayers, e-mail the team and check out the latest news, and that was just for starters.

arcane on-line, which is run as part of FutureNet, Europe's most popular commercial Web site, also offers hot tips on how to build your own game word, essential advice for beginners and links to all the best roleplaying sites on the Internet. And over the next couple of months **arcane** on-line will also be asking for your news stories and gaming scenarios.

So don't just stand there loitering on the digital doorstep, point your Web browser at `http://www.futurenet.co.uk/entertainment/arcane.html` and join **arcane's** on-going party – ties are optional.

Karen Levell, On-line editor
klevell@futurenet.co.uk

Debates rage about all manner of RPG-related issues on the arcane forum. Here's a taster of what's going on out there.

Christianity and roleplaying is a hot topic on the forum as well as in the letters pages...

It's not that roleplaying is evil or wrong, it would appear to be one of those convenient scapegoats. Why blame human nature or society when there is something to pile all the problems on? And anyway, the last research I heard said that roleplayers have a slightly lower suicide rate than the norm – weird that, don't you think!!!

I would say that roleplaying is more an exercise in imagination than in devil worship.

Tgunton@plymouth.ac.uk

Preparation is the key. Of course it can be scary and intimidating to deal with these wackos, some of whom may mean well and believe they have God on their side. However, our club, which does run up against this from time to time, has put together of few papers and oddments to counter the 'but they all worship goats and kill themselves' run-ins.

We have also got tacit agreement from a local clergyman to speak on our behalf. Our club has had two members who have gone on to take the cloth, and we also have a Christian or 20 among our roleplaying ranks.

Do not be tempted to see the dark image that roleplaying might have in some areas as 'sexy'. Speak up if anyone makes such an assertion. Also, make sure your gaming group has someone who is verbally articulate to wheel out on to the inevitable radio or television slots that come up.

Don't be intimidated, be extremely well prepared.

Alan Neill
A.Neill@qub.ac.uk

Most people in the UK don't know a great deal about roleplaying games. The people who do are those who play them (and their patient, long-suffering families, of course) and those people who have joined fine, upstanding institutions such as the university-based Xtian Unions.

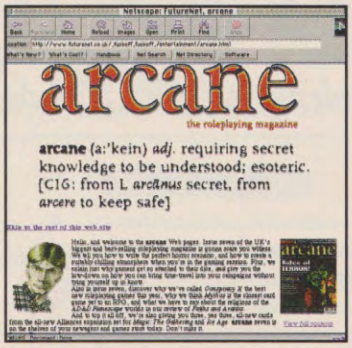
No-one else at university has heard of these games unless they have been subjected to a roleplayer at an earlier stage in their lives. The Xtian Union folk who had heard of roleplaying games couldn't even tell me what was bad about them...

"Roleplaying games... are... just... bad..."

That's how it is. Our student union doesn't care about the society because we aren't political (that's how it is in Northern Ireland). The local shops don't get protests and we still get Fathers turning up to our convention with their kid and saying, "So... could you explain one more time what this roleplaying thing is?"

Obviously, as expert Satanists, we have completely fooled them.

Matt
mjohnstn@nortel.ca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the roleplaying magazine
arcane (a:'kein) adj. requiring secret knowledge to be understood; esoteric. [C16: from L arcānus secret, from arcere to keep safe]

Take a look at the arcane forums on FutureNet if you want to get involved in roleplaying debates.

I would like to thank **arcane** for a well balanced view of the Christian fundamentalist vs roleplaying debate, and for taking the trouble to point out that this is not the opinion held by the majority of Christians.

I have been a Christian and a roleplayer for many years. In some respects I agree with the fundamentalist Christians that this world is full of evil, but what these people fail to realise is that it does not come from roleplaying games or TV, it is a part of human nature. People do not commit murder or suicide because they play roleplaying games, there is usually something greater behind the scenes. Maybe Christians should concentrate on tackling the real problems behind these cases such as poverty, drugs or mental illness.

To me a Christian is someone who helps people. These fundamentalists help no-one and do more damage to people and the message of Christianity than the things they are crusading against ever did.

intp1380@dianal.paisley.ac.uk

What you need to get on-line

*To access **arcane** on-line on FutureNet – and the whole Internet, for that matter – you need the following bits and pieces:*
A computer (PC, Mac, Amiga, etc), a telephone line (your household line is fine), a modem (14,400 baud or 28,800 baud is best), and an Internet account (try Demon on 0181 371 1000 – they provide a good, cheap service).

free reader ads

Like a seedy tavern frequented by rogues and riotous wine-imbibers, the reader ads is where roleplayers find friends, where merchandise and advice is traded and new adventures begin...

games for sale

● *AD&D, MERP, Runequest, WFRP* rulebooks. Various magazines. SAE to Steve, 37 Manor Road, Milborne Port, Sherbourne, Dorset DT9 5BL

● *AD&D* (1st ed). *Oriental Adventures, Manual Planes, Monster Manual, DM's Guide,* Player's Handbook, player/GM's screens. Good condition. Paul 01740 655615

● *World at War* new PBM of diplomacy, politics and warfare in the early 20th century. Phone Robbie 01463 225942

● 1st edition *DMG,* 2 Player's Handbooks, *Fiend Folio, Deities & Demigods, Monster Manual.* All excellent condition. £20 each. Phone Mark 0162 707425

● *Ancestral Trail.* Complete collection. Cost £91, will sell for £50 ono. Ms Kerrigan, 9 Ashtree House, Woodberry Drive, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 3LP

cards for sale

● 300 *ST:TNG* CCG cards including 15 rare cards. £20. Ian DJ Samuels, 26 Station Road, Mochdre, Colwyn Bay, Clwyd LL28 5EF

● *Star Wars* cards for sale. All main characters. Darth Vader wanted. Phone for prices. Claire 01234 271178

● *Star Wars* CCG. Send wants lists with SAE; Colin Rogers, D1, Guildford Hall, Guildford Street, Luton, Beds LU1 2PA

wanted

● Wanted! *Greyhawk* modules *Scourge of the Slavelords, Castle Greyhawk, Fate of Istus.* Will pay well. Contact Ian 01205 760864

● Wanted! Out of print *Shadowrun* supplements, especially *Universal Brotherhood* and *Lone Star,* to borrow or buy. Call Andy 01273 749642

● Iron Crown Enterprises' *Dark Space* supplement. Phone Darren on 01709 798379

● *FGU: C&S* supplements wanted. Will also consider bulk purchase of collections of RPGs. Andrew Mussell, 110a Amethyst Road, Christchurch BH23 3EF

clubs

The university club ads have been dropped for the summer because you've probably all gone inter-railing. Tell us what's new and we'll put you back in September, after your well-deserved holidays.

● Travel and Imagine Gaming Group. Playing *AD&D* at the moment. Willing to play anything. Gosport area. James 01705 353723

● Bournemouth Berserkers Games Club. RPGs: Fri 7-10pm. Wargames: Sun 10am-10pm. New/old players/DMs welcome. Any age. Contact Andrew 01202 481668 for details

● Stockport SAGA roleplaying. Wednesday 8-11.30pm. You name it – we play it. Pub: over 18s only. Telephone Mark 0161 4302061

● WARP. Mon 7.30, 27a Heathfield Road SW18 3HR. 16+. Contact Dave, 53b Cologne Road, SW17 2AH. Phone 0171 7381807

● Carlisle roleplaying and wargaming club. Greystone Community Centre. Meets every Sunday from 2pm till 9pm. Contact Clive 01228 45160

● Omega. Manchester roleplayers meet 2nd and 4th Sundays, 10-5. Contact Paul Mather 0161 3441066 or e-mail mather.dragons @dial. pipex.com

● Doncaster Roleplaying Guild meet Sundays, 7pm, at British Sub-aqua Club, Greyfriars Rd, behind St George's Church

● Help! We are trapped inside *The Amazing Spider-Man!* Haverhill Games Club. Will play anything. Phone Bob 01440 712910

● Portsmouth Tuesdays *Ars Magica* campaign and other RPGs alternate weeks, 20s-40s. SOH. DMs welcome. Ring Ian 01705 240101

● Brentwood Roleplay Club. Thurs 7-10pm, Sherwood House in Highwood Hospital Grounds. £1 a night. All ages. Turn up!

● BADW meet Wednesday evenings at Bragbury End, Stevenage, for roleplaying, wargaming etc. Contact Jane Williams 01438 367799

● Dragons on the Hill. Now residing at the Castle, Furnival Street, London EC4. Age 18+, Wednesdays, 7pm+, upper room

● Alternative Realities, Eastbourne's Premier Games Club. Monday nights 7-10pm. Contact Jarec 01323 500624 or you can e-mail jarec@cix. compulink.co.uk

● Renegade roleplaying club starting again soon in Ilford, Essex area. Over 16s. If interested contact Mark on 0181 4915382

● *Magic: The Gathering, Star Wars & Star Trek.* Join our playing group in Bristol. Call 0117 9721701

● Roleplaying & Games Club, Thursdays 6.30-10pm. The Parkhouse Centre, Bude, Cornwall. For more details ring 01288 355612

● RPGA Network Roleplaying Club. New members welcome. Sunday afternoons 1.45pm, 2nd Arnold Scout HQ, Calverton Rd, Arnold, Nottingham

● Roleplayers wanted. No trained killers. Meet in Irvine, Ayrshire. Play most RPGs, *Vampire* etc. Phone David on 01294 275267

● Birmingham Central Roleplayers. Thursdays 7.30. Ladywood Community Centre. Bar. Over 16s. About £1 a night. Steve Jones 0121 5857263

● Leatherhead Games Club. Small group meets Mondays in Leatherhead. Currently running *Earthdawn Campaign.* Interested? Jef on 01372 375202

● Black Country RPS. Thu 7.30. Waterfall Inn, Waterfall Lane, Blackheath, W Mids. All ages and games. 70p a night. Steve Turner 01384 235244

● Reading Roleplaying Association. Near town centre. 18+ please. Licensed premises. Bar available. Ring Brian on 01734 816195

● Roleplayers of Chester. Weds, 7.30-late. Chester Rail Club, Lightfoot St, Chester. Contact Ged 01244 314435 or Greg 01606 883698

● Inverness roleplaying and wargaming association meets Railway Club (upstairs). Mondays, 6-10pm. Fee: £1.20. First night free

● Established veteran RPG group seeks fresh input. Glasgow area. Own transport useful, not essential. Contact David 0141 6384170

● Small roleplaying group seeks new players in Felixstowe area. 16+ Wide variety of games played. Call Paul 01394 276975

● Mid-Surrey games club meets 2-3 times weekly and welcomes new members – players and DMs. Most RPGs played. All ages. Scott 01932 865308

● Guild of Melee and Magic – London's biggest club. First visit free, annual membership £5. Contact Jason on 0181 7158675 for information

● Guild of Melee and Magic – Central London Branch. Mons RPGs, Tues CCGs, Weds wargames. 5-11pm. Westmoreland Arms, 34 George St W1 – Jason 0181 7158675

● Guild of Melee and Magic – East London Branch. Thurs 7-11pm. Bow Bells, Bow Rd, London E2 – Douglas 0181 5535332

● Guild of Melee and Magic – South London Branch. Sundays 2-7pm. Greyhound, Sydenham Rd, Sydenham SE19 – Jon 0181 6999654

● Guild of Melee and Magic – West London Branch. Sats 2-7, Northfields Community Centre, North Croft Rd, Northfields W16 – Gerald 0181 7239008

Need assistance in setting up a successful club? Contact Jason at the Guild of Melee and Magic – 0181 7158675

contacts

● York area. Inexperienced gamer eager to join any gaming system. Over 20s only. Contact Sarah on 01347 878559

● *Magic* and other games systems especially GW games. New opponents needed between 14-20 yrs. Strood. Phone Robert 01634 221314

● Skinny, white Dundee boy, into (blood) bondage and domination. Seeks cracking boys/girls for *Vampire.* Rick 01382 665310

Please note. All reader ads are accepted in good faith. **arcane** *can't take responsibility for the plight of those who become ensnared in remote castles owned by mysterious nobles who have 'already dined'.*

● *Vampire/AD&D* player seeks correspondents to trade cards, swap ideas etc. Write to Gary, 4 Ransevyn Park, Whitehead, Northern Ireland BT38 9LY

● Veteran aged 30 night shift worker, free on Mon and Wed nights, seeks mature group aged 20+ in the Winchester area. Howard Kingston, Flat 4, Fulflood Court, Greenhill Road, Winchester SO22 5EG

● Experienced RPGer seeks other players in Dublin. Contact Russell at 2300980

● Aldershot to Reading: Mature wargamer interested in Rifts/sci-fi/fantasy in 6mm!! Call John 01344 780276. Clubs, individuals, 'others'

● *Cyberpunk* GM seeks 4-6 man Corp Covert Ops team to return to basics. Wayne. Dundee 506451

● *Champions* players wanted by experienced GM in London area to start new on-going Superhero campaign. Contact Dean 0181 2523315

● Players wanted to play a range of sci-fi, fantasy and horror systems. Somerset and Devon. Contact: Mike 01458 447989

● *Cyberpunk* ref and *AD&D, Kult, WFRP*

reader ads

player seeks club/group in Herts area. Contact James on 01992 589689

● Maturer RPG player into *AD&D, Runequest, CoC* etc seeks other players. Contact Steve, 31 Riverview, Sturry, Canterbury, Kent

● RPG players/club wanted. Will play anything. Pref *AD&D, Traveller*. Pref 18+ male/female, ref/players. Corby area. Call Paul 0468 125920

● Cheltenham group seeks players (18+) for *AD&D/Shadowrun*. Other games considered. Contact Joe on 01242 226648 after 6pm

● Smallish gaming group wishes to start club. Needs players, DMs. Tameside area. Contact Alan 0161 3082053

● 'Ancient' gamer (34) without transport: *CoC, GURPS, Star Trek, Cyberpunk*, requires others to resurrect himself. Call Chris 01703 211237

● Player/GM seeks other players in local area. Contact Andy at 13 Albright House, Kempsey Close, Oldbury B69 1EY

● *Rage, Magic, Blood Bowl!* 13 year-old player needs somebody to play with. Nicholas Gunn, Laverstock, Salisbury 01722 337382

● Novice and limboed *AD&D* player would like to start a roleplaying group in Bristol/Chew Valley area. Jon 01761 452766

● GM/player seeks sensible RPG groups in Bexhill area. I hate hack 'n' slash. Call James 0973914004

● Appreciators of all things imaginary contact 'The Dead Duet' to form group into fantasy/sci-fi. 22 Tormead, Hythe, Southampton 01703 849842

● Players wanted for fantasy and sci-fi postal RPGs. Please contact Paul Baldowski, 93 Newark Drive, Corby, Northants NN18 0HA

● 30 year-old seeks group/ individuals; Matlock/Cromford area. Can ref at a push. Phone Gary 01629 826112

● Dublin gamers seek fresh talent, players with an open mind willing to play RPGs and LARPs. Contact Jason Hickey 01 2801097

● Female, 25+ (Doncaster area) wants to roleplay again. Can you help? Contact Jane 01302 881346

● Complete novice (early 20s) seeks local RPG group. Taunton area. Will travel. Neil 01823 353681

● *M:TG* and *Games Workshop* players wanted in Horsham, West Sussex area. Contact Paul, (aged 15) on 01403 733433

● *40K* and *Warhammer* players wanted. Tunbridge Wells area. Please contact Anthony Burgess, 33 Leeves Close, Heathfield TN21 0AW

● I'm looking for *AD&D* players in the Carlisle area. Phillip Harrison, 2 Parham Grove, Belle Vue, Carlisle, Cumbria CA2 7RW. Aged 17+

● Players/Storytellers wanted for *Werewolf: the Apocalypse*. Also maybe other RPGs. Medway area. Contact Neal 01634 719194

● 15 year-old *AD&D* player seeks fellow gamers in the Portsmouth area. Please, please contact me soon. Stuart 01705 610901

Stuart might like to try Travel & Imagine, advertised in the 'clubs' section this month.

live action

● *Fomoria* LRP in darkest Dorset! Overland sites, latex weapons, fully-costumed experienced monsters, beginners welcome. Darren 01725 517322

● *I.O.W. Masquerade Vampire* LARP meetings every other Sunday, Newport Youth Centre, 7.15pm. Details 01983 528758 Nigel. New members wanted

● *Sword & Sorcery* LRP in Manchester area. Contact 'Nemesis' 0161 7476905 or write to 2 Whitegates Rd, Cheadle SK8 1EA

● *Fantasy/Vampire* LRP, Derby/Nottingham. Contact Martin Lee 08501 89892

● The Dark Door Club runs *Cthulhu*-esque LRP adventures. For information contact P. Hardy, 32 Park Hall Road, London SE21 8DW

● *Elemental Lords* LRP based in Worcester; a fantasy game of magic, mayhem and monsters. Contact Paul 01905 425672 for more details

● Are there any LRPers of *Vampire: The Masquerade* (or others?) in the Birmingham area? Phone Danny 0121 4782163

fanzines

● *Role Your Own* fanzine: for *Vampire, Cyberpunk*. Send SAE and £1.00 to 12 Colwick Lodge, Whimsey Park, Nottingham

● *Journey's End* Console RPG fanzine – £1.50. Ann Simpson, 230 Thornbridge Avenue, Great Barr, Birmingham B42 2AL, tel: 0121 6047524

● Writers and artists wanted for new SF/Fantasy magazine. SAE to 39, Stoneyfield Road, Old Coulsdon, Surrey CR5 2HP – UK

We wrote to these people. Nothing. Most probably hippies.

● *Warpstone – the Warhammer* FRP fanzine. £1 from John Foody, 10 Colenso Road, Clapton, London E5

● Discover play-by-mail games! 40-page fanzine £1.75. Cheques payable to "Jamie Lang", 53 Scott Road, Sheffield S4 7BG

● *Entity*, the skiffy fanzine. Fiction, PBM. Send 40p and SSAE to Entity, Old Barn, Hundley Way, Charlbury OX7 3QE

● *Role Call* – A4 fanzine for console RPGs (*FFIII* etc.). 4 issues available £1.20 or £7 sub (6 issues). Rachel Ryan 01925 490910

● New fanzine. *RAGE!* It covers RPGs, PBMs, CCGs, sci-fi & lots of other stuff. Tel 01291 421105 Peter

messages

● Brianna Serpensrouge. You have always been my Friend and Protector. Now be my Bondmate. Khaelyan Avfenn. Gilmoriel Solenarian

● Drax. Graynor has captured Jakiah. Urgent help needed. Contact Pensif at Middle Point Midweek. ID 2501394

● Tremere Licks can suck on my big throbbing toe. Ya freaked out mages. Hosie Santos, Ravnos fae Chicago

other stuff

● 7,200 point Eldar army – characters, troops, support weapons, harlequins. Over 200 models worth £475 new. £350 ono 01923 852645

● Collection JRR Tolkein books. New condition. Will sell for half cover price. Ms Kerrigan, 9 Ashtree House, Woodberry Drive, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 3LP

● PBMs (e-mail) – info wanted on available games. group.admar-2000@eurocontrol.be

● Clan Amber, a residential Amber RPG convention in Edinburgh. 8-10 Nov. Contact Nicky Cannon, 70/5 Craighouse Gardens, Edinburgh EH10 5UN

● Write to Trevannion House, Cardrew Lane, Redruth, Cornwall for free RPG by mail! Leave Address. Ten players needed

● UK gamers list. Send SAE with details to Ross, 369 Broomhead Drive, Dunfermline KY12 9AG

● Fantasy/SF figure painting service. Award-winning artist. Send SAE to Paul, 27 Diamond Street, York YO3 7LH

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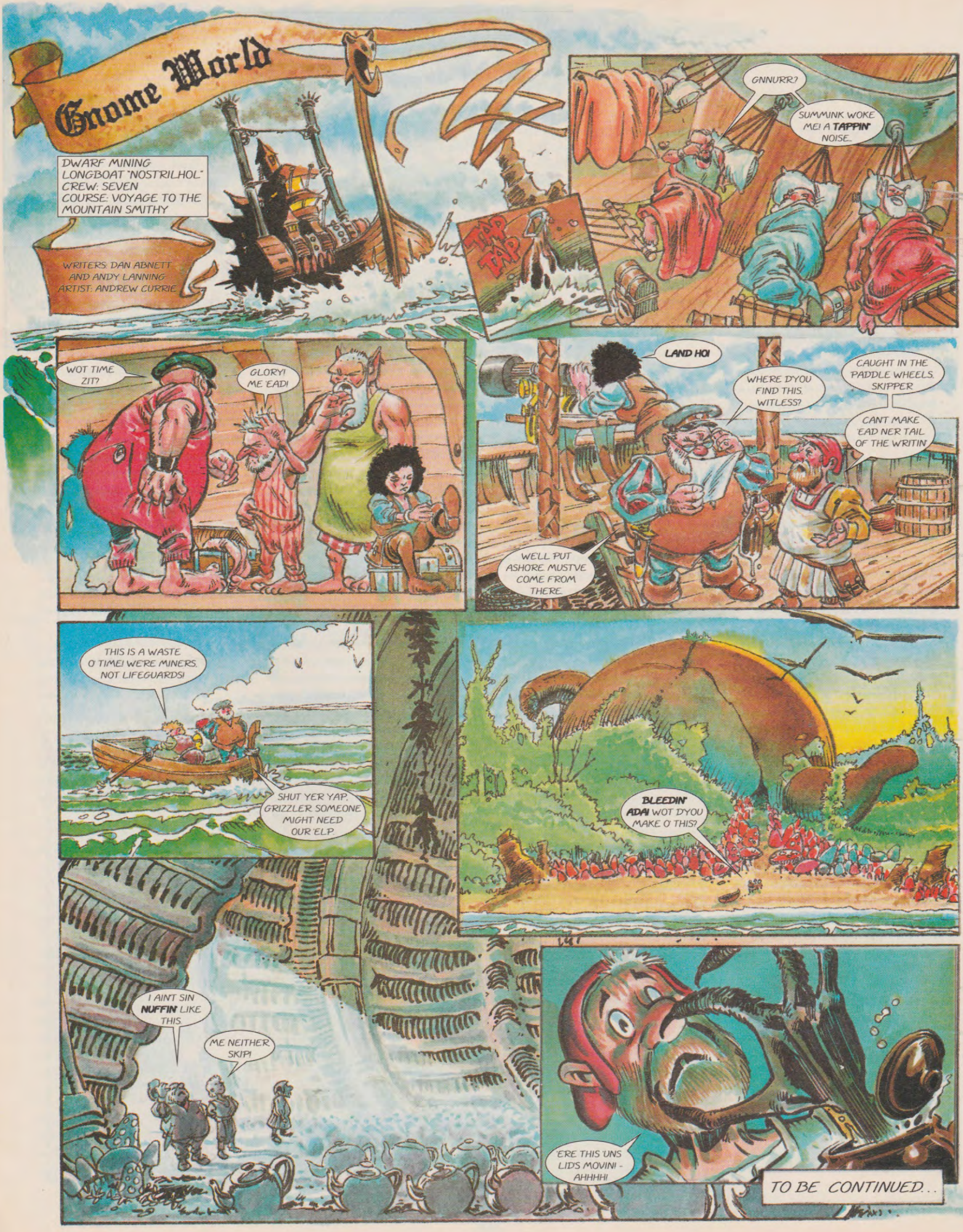
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GLORY! ME 'EAD!
LAND HO!
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CAUGHT IN THE PADDLE WHEELS, SKIPPER
CANT MAKE 'EAD NER TAIL OF THE WRITIN'
WE'LL PUT ASHORE MUSTVE COME FROM THERE
THIS IS A WASTE O' TIME! WE'RE MINERS, NOT LIFEGUARDS!
SHUT YER YAP, GRIZZLER SOMEONE MIGHT NEED OUR 'ELP
BLEEDIN' ADA! WOT D'YOU MAKE O' THIS?
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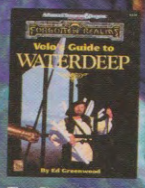

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